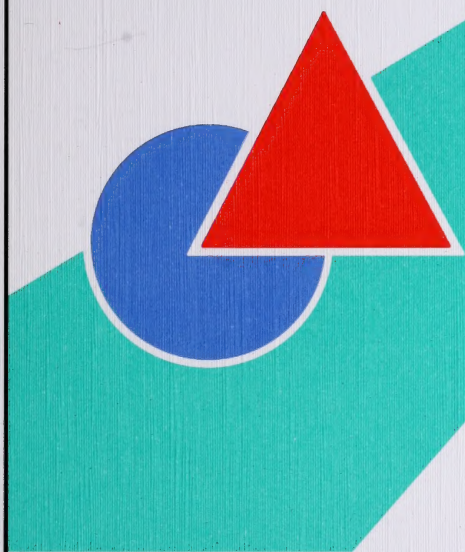


SPIRITAN LIFE



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**Spiritans and
Islam**

Spiritan Life aims at being a forum for Ongoing Formation and Animation:

- *through the shared experiences of confreres,*
- *through reflection on these experiences,*
- *through the inspiration of our founders, our tradition and the demands of mission today.*

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EDITORIAL : SPIRITANS AND ISLAM

Robert Ellison

Ordained in 1969 in the Irish Province, Bobby Ellison has spent most of his life as a Spiritan in The Gambia, engaged in a variety of apostolates: parish work, dialogue with Muslims in rural ministry, Director of the Gambia Pastoral Institute and Superior of the District. He studied theology at the Gregorian University in Rome and returned there later for further studies in Islamology at PISAI. He was responsible for organising the two international meetings of Spiritans working in a Muslim context: Dakar in 1989 and Banjul in 2002. He is currently Secretary General to the Congregation in Rome.

The story of Spiritan involvement in the world of Islam goes back a long time. In a certain sense, it began with the sending of the first missionaries by Libermann to the West coast of Africa and later to the East coast. Just one year ago, our confreres in Algeria celebrated a hundred years of Spiritan presence in that country. In those early days, even before the concept of dialogue as we know it to-day existed, Libermann instructed his missionaries to treat those who rejected the faith they came to preach with the same charity and care as they did the faithful. And we can look upon Blessed Jacques Laval as our 'ancestor in the faith' in the context of his special charism for bringing together Muslims, Hindus and Christians on the island of Mauritius.

In this edition of *Spiritane Life*, we bring you the story of this dimension of our Spiritan mission as it stands to-day. You will find here a number of reports from various circumscriptions which give us some idea of the overall story of the Spiritan contribution to the mission of inter-religious dialogue in our world to-day, with special reference to Muslims. These reports are taken from among those given by the 22

confreres who took part in the meeting for Spiritans working among Muslims, which took place in Banjul, The Gambia at the end of June 2002. They have been chosen so as to represent the great variety of situations in which we find ourselves in this particular kind of mission today – both from the geographical spread and in terms of the variety of Muslim presence encountered.

The Ecclesial Context.

Before giving a brief presentation of these reports, it would be opportune to retrace certain events which triggered the development of our involvement in this area of mission. Needless to say, Vatican II provided a major turning point in terms of its understanding of the nature of the Church – as mystery or sacrament, as a sign and instrument for bringing about unity and peace in the world. Its declarations on Religious Liberty and Non-Christian Religions were also to have far-reaching implications for an approach to mission by way of dialogue.

However, while the Council clearly affirmed the possibility of salvation outside the Church for individuals, it did not attempt to make any statement about the salvific value of non-Christian religions in themselves. The thinking of the Council remained strongly 'ecclesiocentric', while at the same time exhorting Catholics to embrace a sincere attitude of respect and openness to other religions. The new pastoral orientations were not reinforced by a corresponding theological basis for these attitudes. Many missionaries working in Muslim milieux found themselves in an ambiguous situation. The allegations coming from the Muslim side are evidence of this confusion: 'We are afraid of entering the door of dialogue, because you really want us to leave through the door of conversion'.

We cannot ignore the double message that Christians (and not just Catholics) have portrayed in their mission work, giving rise to a deep-seated fear of proselytism among Muslims. They have described the 'dialogue' of social collaboration of Christian missionaries as a systematic and enormous exploitation of their members through educa-

tion, medicine, development etc. It was perceived as an unethical approach to mission.

Twenty-five years after Vatican II, the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples and the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue published a document called: *'Proclamation and Dialogue'* (1991). This was an opportune attempt to address the tension that is almost inherent in any understanding of mission that tries to bring together the two elements of dialogue and evangelisation. Dialogue is not an alternative to evangelisation nor a substitute for it; one implies the other and both can be considered as different aspects or phases of the one mission of the Church.

In the Synod of Bishops for Africa (1994), one full section of the Synod was devoted to the importance of Dialogue. Dialogue between Muslims and Christians is described as an urgent matter since both religions are working hard to make converts. Hence great prudence is required in order to avoid a dangerous 'collision course' between Islamic Da'wa and Christian evangelisation in this great continent. The Synod acknowledged that Islam is a difficult but important partner because of its genuine religious values, its large following and the deep roots it has struck among many African peoples.

The Spiritan Context:

A **first meeting of Spiritans** for whom Islam constitutes a challenge to their mission took place in **Dakar in 1989**. The 'statement' from the 15 participants who attended this meeting has been attached to the 'statement' from the 22 participants from the Banjul meeting in this issue of *Spiritan Life*. The convictions and the vision articulated at both meetings are fundamentally the same. Most of the eight obstacles to dialogue identified by the confreres at the Dakar meeting became topics for ongoing reflection at the Banjul meeting. However, for me there was one striking difference: the sense of 'suspicion' within the Church in general and our own Congregation in particular with regard to the idea of dialogue as an authentic form of mission has diminished significantly (or is even on the way out altogether?). *'We totally reject any marginalisation of our activity in the context of Spiritan mission'*

(Dakar meeting). Such a comment betrays the sense of isolation or the lack of support experienced by Spiritans who had been labouring in this field of mission which already provides more than its own share of obstacles from 'without'.

The Itaici Chapter (1992) became a turning point in this tension with the presentation of one of its lived experiences on '*Dialogue: One way of Mission*'. While the Maynooth Chapter (1998) did not deal directly with this issue, it outlined the 'Characteristics of Spiritan Mission Today' very clearly: being present; crossing frontiers; openness to new horizons; collaboration; proclamation and dialogue as a constitutive part of our Spiritan mission. What had been a significant concern at the Dakar meeting has now become an approved understanding of the way forward for Spiritan mission. In a similar way, it is hoped that the message from the Banjul meeting ('*The Hope within us*') may become for the wider Congregation just one concrete expression of commitment to this kind of mission elaborated by the Maynooth Chapter.

In his article '**Mission at the Frontiers and the Frontiers of Mission**', Pierre Schouver presents us with a further reflection on the nature of mission at the dawn of this new millennium. It brings us yet another step along a journey that began in a new way for all Spiritans when our Rule of Life invited us '*to respond creatively to the needs of evangelisation of our time*' (SRL, 2) and when the Itaici Chapter put before us the question: '*Where is the Spirit leading us?*' In former times, we did not ask such questions. Our understanding of mission was quite clear: to proclaim the Gospel of Christ to all nations and to baptise those who believed in his message. The main focus of attention was on what we had to bring to those others, while showing much less concern for the precise nature of the situation in which they were living before we arrived.

To-day, we are called to look more deeply at the wide range of situations in our world clamouring for the light of the Gospel message, or more important, for the presence and solidarity of living witnesses bringing a sense of hope from this message to those who have none – refugees, unemployed youth, drug addicts, people of other religions, AIDS etc. There is a greater focus of attention now on the needs of the

people to whom we bring the Gospel message than there was before. Pope John Paul II in his encyclical '*Redemptoris Missio*' refers to these needs as those '*socio-cultural contexts in which Christ and his Gospel are not known*'. In its Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Vatican II expressed the same idea: '*The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ...The Council brings to mankind light kindled from the Gospel and puts at its disposal those saving resources ...which the Church receives from her Founder*' (GS, No.1).

It is in this context that Pierre explores the various ways in which the Spirit may be calling us to the frontiers of mission. It is a much less tidy or structured approach to mission. And it is not for us to know about dates or times which the Father has set...; but we believe that we are called to be His witnesses in the power of the same Spirit that inspired the first apostles. 'We are not aiming at immediate results in our mission; we believe in the slow but lasting fruitfulness of the witness of communities inspired by the Gospel'.

Our Spiritan Experiences:

We now take a look at one way in which Spiritans are engaged in mission at the frontiers. Each participant who attended the Banjul meeting was asked to prepare a short report dealing with what is actually happening in his area of mission in terms of relations and dialogue with Muslims. These reports provided the 'input' which formed the first part of the meeting. The meeting followed the 'see, judge and act' methodology. The theme chosen for the meeting was: '*Christians and Muslims: building bridges of Understanding and Respect*'. The overall aim or purpose of the meeting focussed on the pastoral challenges and the spiritual demands of such an apostolate. The participants themselves were the main instruments in providing for each other the inspiration and motivation needed for this.

The report from **North Cameroon** (Juan Maria Ayanz and Basil Agba) describes the various phases in the process of Islamisation which have

occurred in this area over a period of about a thousand years: the initial influence of Muslim traders from North Africa, the attempt to form a theocracy, the role of the Sufi Brotherhoods and now, more recently, the impact of Islamic reformist movements (the Wahhabi and Da'wa). They represent the various ways in which Islam has tried to reach down into or penetrate the various layers of the culture of these peoples. It is a good example of what the African Synod of Bishops referred to as the drive to win Africa for Islam. However, in spite of this threat, a dialogue of social collaboration in the face of common problems provides a forum for interaction and communication in daily life. And our confreres here raise an interesting question in the light of reactions in the Muslim world to extreme radical forms of Islam. They point to certain signs that would indicate that Islamic Reformist movements are separating themselves from such expressions of Islam. Whatever be the answer, one thing is clear: the Muslim world is going through a process of upheaval and turbulence within itself in its search for the kind of 'Umma'(community) that would give a concrete expression to the religious and political ideals of the Golden Age of Islam.

The report from **Ghana** (John Osei Yaw) presents us with a situation in the northern part of Ghana where relations between Christians and Muslims are portrayed in a positive or even a cordial manner. Islam has become an integral part of the life of the people in this area going back many centuries. However, in 1991, a Muslim-Christian reflection group was set up to share and discuss areas of common interest. In 1995, the Archbishop of Tamale officially inaugurated a special committee made up of forty members, divided equally among Christians and Muslims, to direct the aims and objectives of the group. A Muslim was nominated as Chairperson and he still holds this office. This group/committee has helped to maintain a good spirit of understanding and respect between Christians and Muslims in this part of the country.

The challenges here seem to come more from 'within': the lack of interest in this kind of mission among many priests; the attitudes of other Christian denominations and their approach to evangelism.

Bishop Augustine Shao tells an enthusiastic story from the **Diocese of Zanzibar** about his approach to a dialogue of social collaboration in

areas like education, health, women's development and youth. Zanzibar is 99% Muslim. However, it is very poor and underdeveloped. Just five years ago, a Diocesan Pastoral Plan was drawn up with the aim of helping to relieve the poverty situation and provide a sense of hope for these people – the vast majority of whom are Muslim. Signs of better relations between the tiny Christian community and the Muslim majority are already emerging from these new initiatives. The same also holds with the various government departments and local Muslim leaders. This approach to dialogue is a fine example of the way in which Libermann instructed his missionaries to act, when they found themselves in such situations.

René You, in the light of his long years of experience in **Algeria**, presents us with some reflections on the way he sees the current situation of relations between Christians and Muslims in general. He reminds us of how quick we can be to point the finger at the scale of violence and terror that has been unleashed by extreme elements of the Muslim world; and this of course is perfectly true. However, we are far slower in asking ourselves what is it that has provoked such outrageous behaviour? We seem to be unable to look at our own share of the responsibility that lies at the roots of the frustration and anger so apparent in the Muslim world. We are unable to sense the humiliation and oppression felt so deeply in the Muslim-Arab world which has escalated so sharply since the Gulf War, and which is perceived as another expression of the colonial legacy. The economic, political and military weight of the 'Christian- West' has consequently become a target of attack.

This important observation reminds me of an article which I read in 1991 in *'The Tablet'* in which the author was reflecting on the demise of communism and its possible consequences. Among a number of points he was making was that the West would have to find another 'enemy'; and he then identified Islam as the possible enemy. This prophecy has been fulfilled. And now the Western world has also become shrouded in fear; a fear not only of further attacks and reprisals, but worse still – the deeper fear of looking honestly at its own contribution to the spiralling tensions that destroy the equilibrium of

our world to-day. The Palestinian-Israeli conflict is a sad and tragic example of this. And still, René believes that there are reasons to hope that things can be better. *'Communion is possible if differences are respected and our coming together is marked by genuine trust and fidelity...it is the only way to drive a wedge into the insolent certainty of the most hardened fanatics'*.

In his presentation about **Mauritius**, Jean Luc Rencker describes in a vivid manner two short 'slices of life' which underline the sharp contrast that can be found among the Muslims living in this small island. The story about what happened in the village Bakery serves to reinforce the image that most Christians have of Islam: they are fanatics. The story about the young Muslims who gave witness to their faith to a group of Christians who wanted to discover more about Islam (and vice versa) shows us the other side of the coin. Both groups recognised the major differences in their beliefs; yet both insisted that the essential point in their respective religions is fidelity to what is demanded by God in each tradition: the love of God and the love of one's brothers. In other words, the dogmatic gulf (among other factors) does not exclude the possibility of a truly spiritual exchange.

Both of these stories indicate that the first step to dialogue must be the breaking down of barriers and prejudices. Otherwise, both sides remain prisoners of the ethnic, cultural and religious fortresses that they have inhabited for so long. But this is a slow process.....

History can be an important teacher. This is what struck me most when I read the account of Islam in the **Philippines** (from Daniel Sormani). Over the last year or two, the media has reported on kidnappings and the killing of Christians (including tourists and priests) by Muslim rebel groups opposed to the government. This is nothing new, though it does indicate its links with an upsurge of this kind of violence coming from the wider Muslim world. Its roots? *'For Muslims, this is a country (Philippines) that was invaded and continues to be invaded by Christians'*. The brief history of this country as given by Daniel gives us a glimpse as to how we might try to understand the antagonism that has divided the two communities – Muslim and Christian. It is a classical example of how blind the Christian-West can be with regard to the

ways in which it can oppress and manipulate another people's religious beliefs and cultural values – and then wonder why these people are so aggressive! The legacy of the colonial era has provoked a lot of mistrust, rancour and aggression among Muslims.

This is the context in which the Spiritans in the Philippines try to collaborate with the many small local peace initiatives which have been started by the Church with the aim of building bridges....across a deep divide.

Our confreres in **Pakistan** provide us with a very comprehensive study and reflection on the impact of this Islamic State on their mission there. It represents the fruits of the lived experiences of the Spiritan International Group which is celebrating this year the silver jubilee of its arrival in Pakistan. There is a certain irony in the fact that the Spiritans were invited to work in Pakistan among a marginalised Hindu tribe, to which was then added the pastoral responsibility for Punjabi Christians. However, through their ministry to these two oppressed ethnic minorities, they came to an experience of and an insight into the lived reality of this overwhelmingly Islamic culture in a country which is 97.5% Muslim. It is an experience that is narrated in a very forthright and honest way. At a wider level, they have been able to come to a deep understanding of Pakistani Islam from two quite different perspectives: their ministry among these oppressed minority groups as well as from their various contacts with Muslims themselves in daily life. They also point out that the situation of oppression stems more from the influence of the caste system which runs right through Pakistani society rather than from the teachings of Islam.

The interaction of religion, politics, culture, caste systems, shar'ia and other factors all go to make up a kind of Islam which is very diverse and complex and which is anything but monolithic. But its all pervading presence and influence on those who live in a minority situation of vulnerability, fear and oppression raises some basic questions about the kind of Church that can survive in such conditions. The vision and style of Church articulated in reply to these questions call for a quality of conversion and transformation that is most challenging.

Our guest writer for this edition of Spiritan Life, Anthony O'Malley, provides us with an informative article on the Christian Muslim situation in **Europe**. In western Europe alone, we are reminded that there are now some ten to twelve million Muslims – in countries that have for centuries been regarded as the heart of Christendom. Their presence has provoked fear and suspicion in some quarters, while proving to be a stimulus for inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue in others. As they continue to grow in number, the question of their status has given rise to tensions and concerns both from within their own communities and also from the point of view of the host countries. Their ability to integrate or even adapt to what they encounter in Europe is especially acute for those who come from very traditional backgrounds and then have to face life in a very secular and modern environment in which there is often little room for religious practices. The difficulties of social integration are therefore considerable.

Muslims in Europe have identified three different ways of responding to this predicament: preservation, integration or mission. Each of these presents a challenge to Europeans. Can we prepare ourselves to live in a Europe which would be open to a pluralistic society in which Christians, Muslims and non-believers could live together in a spirit of respect and tolerance? The author of this article concludes with an apt reminder of the statements of Vatican II about Muslims and also a reference to the thinking of Pope John Paul II on this question: *'His is a vision for to-day's Europe – a vision with which Christians can approach Muslims not merely eager to speak and to give, but also ready to learn.'*

(Here is an ideal opportunity for Spiritans who have returned home to Europe from mission countries where they worked among Muslims. At the Banjul meeting, two such Spiritans spoke of their ministry in this context. Just below, you will find a comment from Harrie Tullemans (Holland) on this point).

In a separate article '**Spiritans: Experiences and Testimonies**', the editor has combined eight short extracts from other reports given during the meeting. These serve to underline even further the great variety of situations in which Spiritans try to respond to the call to

ensure some form of interaction among the Christian and Muslim communities with whom they work. The fundamental aim in all of this is to provide some forum whereby both parties remain no longer inert or isolated in their living and thinking. The absence of any form of communication or interaction invariably becomes a fertile breeding ground for the fears and suspicions that usually make a climate of trust impossible.

Concluding Remarks.

'They don't want it; it's a waste of time'. That is the answer I got from members of a Parish Council in The Gambia after I had given what I thought was a very animated talk followed by a discussion on the subject of dialogue with Muslims. All too often we hear the same kind of comments: 'why do we always have to take the initiative?'. The lack of reciprocity from the Muslim side can be a major obstacle leading to a lot of frustration on the part of the missionary and providing an excuse on the part of our Christian communities who find this kind of thing a hopeless cause. It is a common thread running through most of the experiences shared at the Banjul meeting. And so we are confronted with a double challenge: the absence on the Muslim side of any serious desire or the feeling that there is no need to engage in dialogue, and the kind of reaction that this provokes among our Christians.

The world into which the Son of God became man was hardly a world waiting with open arms to welcome its Redeemer, even though he came among us 'in the fullness of time'. We like to think that we possess the fullness of the truth (or at least most of it) and that therefore we are better than the 'others'. But we can fail to stop and ponder on what that truth can demand of us. *'If you love only those who love you, are you any better than the pagans?'* When we have begun to look afresh at the implications of certain familiar words of Jesus and let them find a home in us, only then can we begin to confirm our brothers and sisters in their own faith. This is a slow and painful process yet still an important element in this whole movement of building bridges of understanding and respect with our Muslim neighbours. Collaboration with the local Church at all levels (and also with other Christian

Churches) is essential in this kind of mission. Missionaries come and go, but the Christian community remains. A quick look at the list of 22 participants who attended the Banjul meeting shows that some six of these are no longer at the mission which they represented (either on a temporary or more permanent basis, and for whatever reason).

Forty years have passed since the opening of Vatican II. There we find a vision of the Church in terms of its mission to the world which gives us the inspiration we need for this kind of apostolate: *'So it is that this messianic people, although it does not actually include all men, and may more than once look like a small flock, is nonetheless a lasting and sure seed of unity, hope and salvation for the whole human race....it is also used by Him (Christ) as an instrument for the redemption of all, and is sent forth into the whole world as the light of the world and the salt of the earth'* (L.G. 9). The stories that were shared at the Banjul meeting are like so many echoes or images of this great vision.

As a shift in theology brings about the need for a change in our pastoral approaches to mission, in the same way the new pastoral approaches often call for a deepening of our spirituality. Both of these steps require a formation of the mind but also a trans-formation at the level of the heart. This is the more difficult. The message from the confreres at the Banjul meeting **'The Hope within us'** would seem to indicate that this process is at least on the way. I was personally struck by the evident depth of concern and commitment which they bring to this sensitive area of mission. There was a lot of diversity within the group in terms of nationality, age and experience; however, there was also a fundamental sense of unity of vision and of purpose with regard to the mission of building better relations with the peoples of the Muslim world.

The wider Congregation has reason to hope because of their hope. May it inspire all of us during this special Spiritan Year to engage ourselves with greater enthusiasm in the mission we have received from the Spirit.

PAKISTAN: OUR PRESENCE TO THE WORLD OF ISLAM

The Spiritan Group in Pakistan

This year, the Spiritans in Pakistan are celebrating the 25th anniversary of their arrival in the country in 1977. The in-depth reflection that follows is the fruit of their lived experiences over this period.

For centuries during the Mughal empire, and even before that during the Delhi Sultanate, the Indian sub-continent was ruled by its Muslim minority. The Indian independence movement spearheaded by the forerunners of the present Congress party, was initially supported by M. Ali Jinnah the future founder of Pakistan, and the leader of the Muslim League. Gradually, Jinnah came to believe that an independent India would be a Hindu *Raj* inimical to the aspirations of the Muslim minority, and worked tirelessly for the rest of his life for the creation of Pakistan, an independent Muslim homeland comprising the contiguous provinces of British India and Princely States with a Muslim majority.

The Emergence of Pakistan

Jinnah's dream was fulfilled in August 1947 when the British partitioned India and created Pakistan. The partitioning of India however, also included the partitioning of the Punjab, a cataclysmic event of ethnic cleansing and mass murder with unspeakable atrocities carried out by all sides. The new state came into being in the midst of mayhem and massive displacement and against the background of the unresolved question of Kashmir, which continues to overshadow it to this day. The painful secession of Bangladesh, twenty-five years later, gave proof if proof were needed, that a common religion alone cannot resolve the problems of ethnic tension and national identity.

On balance, it seems reasonable to infer that Jinnah's concept of the new Muslim state was secular and constitutional. Most of his speeches - not to mention his lifestyle - affirm this conclusion, especially a very

significant one to the new Constituent Assembly in the early days of the new nation, when he declared that religion had: "nothing to do with the business of the state." But Jinnah was in failing health and was to die a year after the creation of Pakistan. His deputy Liaqat All Khan, was assassinated a short few years later; in all probability because his plans for democratizing the new state did not rest easily with vested interests in the Punjab.

Into the power vacuum stepped the bureaucratic elite which had effectively run the country under the British and whose power base had if anything, been unwittingly strengthened by the centralizing tendencies of Jinnah. In alliance with the military and the feudal landlords, and co-opting the religious leaders as a means of controlling the masses, this troika took over control over Pakistan. It has never relinquished it. Democracy in Pakistan has always been a semblance for the sake of overseas consumption: allowed to function until the level of mismanagement and corruption demanded direct military intervention. This has been the clear pattern of Pakistani history which is now experiencing its fourth military dictatorship in fifty years. There have never been two successive democratically elected governments in the history of the state which completed their term. For geopolitical reasons, the military rulers are, in the end, always supported by the U.S.A., notwithstanding the jargon of democracy and civil rights.

One of the ironies of history is that the Muslims who had campaigned most vigorously for the creation of Pakistan were, by and large, not the ones who lived in the territory that now bears that name. The latter had been secure in their position of majority. The people who struggled for Pakistan were the Muslims to the east of what is now Pakistan, millions of whom migrated to the new country after partition. Although Muslims number 97.5% of the population¹ and control every facet of public life and virtually all the means of production, they have inherited from history a sense of being a beleaguered minority and speak and act as if they have to defend Islam. This has adversely affected their treatment of minorities. It also governs their attitude to inter-religious dialogue.

The Islamisation of Pakistan

Originally the Maulvis were opposed to Jinnah. They viewed the struggle for Pakistan as a nationalistic venture hostile to the interests of the Muslim community (*Umma*) and issued a judgment (*fatwa*) declaring him an infidel (*kaffir*). Once Pakistan was established however, they immediately put all their efforts into turning it into a sectarian theocratic state. The new constitution of 1956 gave the title, “Islamic Republic of Pakistan” to the nation. It was prefaced by an “Objectives Resolution” stating the desire to make Pakistan an Islamic state, paving the way for the legal division of the citizenry into Muslims and non-Muslims.

Z.A. Bhutto’s Constitution of 1973, by defining in Article 2A, a state “*wherein the principles of democracy...as enunciated by Islam, shall be observed,*” would later leave the whole apparatus of the state subject to the interpretation of Islamic fundamentalists. Contrary to the original constitution [Art. 41(2)], it stated that only a Muslim could be president. A year before that Bhutto had promulgated Martial Law Regulation 118, under which he had nationalized Christian and other privately run schools, in clear violation of Arts. 10, 12 & 14 of the Constitution. In practice, nationalization meant Islamisation. The consequences were ruinous for the vast majority of Christian children. The cynicism of the law was apparent from the exemption of the English-medium schools run by the Church which catered for the Muslim elite.

The dictatorship of Gen. Zia-ul-Haq saw the establishment of “Federal Shariat Courts” with the power to decide “*whether or not any law or provision of law is repugnant to the injunctions of Islam,*” thereby negating the sovereignty of parliament. Zia added two sections to the Penal Code (295): Section B, making willful damage to even an extract from the Holy Quran (e.g., in a school book) punishable by life imprisonment; and C, making any derogatory remark about the Prophet of Islam (PBUH), even indirectly or by innuendo, punishable by death or life imprisonment. This was further amended in 1990 making the crime punishable only by death. A large number of cases, mostly on trumped-up charges, have been registered under 295C, leading to the deaths of innocent people. It is not difficult to imagine the extremely

negative implications of this situation for inter-religious dialogue between Muslims and Christians. The fact that it can take place at all is a tribute to the courage and inventiveness of the Pakistani people.

By introducing a separate electorate for minorities, Zia created an apartheid system in the country. He changed the laws of evidence (*Haddood Ordinance*) to make the evidence of one Muslim equal to the testimony of two non-Muslims in a court of law. The same ordinance made the testimony of one male equal to the testimony of two females.

The Nawaz Sherif regime reintroduced the Objectives Resolution into the Constitution (Order No. 14, 1995); but with an ominous omission. Originally the relevant paragraph had read: "*adequate provision shall be made for the minorities freely to profess and practise their religions...*". In the Constitutional Amendment, the term *freely* was removed. Muslim ideologues increasingly sought to classify the minorities as "*dhimis*," (people under obligation). The term, however, is inapplicable. In Islamic tradition it refers to people who have been militarily defeated and have agreed to live in an Islamic state on the payment of a tax so as to be excused military service. In fact the minorities lived in this territory long before the creation of Pakistan, have never been militarily defeated, have served with distinction in the army, and have entered into no such contract.

Perspective of the Oppressed

The Spiritans arrived in Pakistan in December 1977. They had been invited by the local Catholic Episcopal conference to come to work among an oppressed and marginalized Hindu tribe called the Marwari-Bhils. After their arrival it was made clear to the group that they could engage in this work only if they were also willing to take up pastoral responsibilities among the Punjabi Christians, themselves, in the main, a despised and marginalized minority. So although the group found itself in a land where 97.5% of the population were Muslims and surrounded in every possible way by the life and symbols of this overwhelmingly Islamic culture, its primary focus was not on formal dialogue with this world. At the same time, a dialogue of life with this world was the context of all its life and ministry. In a very basic way,

our presence to the world of Islam has been defined by our commitment to these two oppressed ethnic minorities and has been shaped by *their* experience of Islam. They have experienced Islam as oppression. In all probability, this has as much to do with a combination of various socio-cultural forces which operate to marginalise and oppress them, as it has to do with Islam as a religion, considered theologically. But the distinction, valid though it may be, is lost at the level of *their* daily experience. Part of the explanation lies in the fact that below the surface of Indo-Pakistani Islam, lie centuries of the internalization of the caste sensibilities of the Hindu *varna*² system.

Whatever about religious ideology, be it Islamic, Sikh or even Christian, the underlying determining factor in social relations and divisions is caste. From this point of view, both the Punjabi Christians and the Marwari-Bhils are *avarna* - outside the *varna* system and therefore, untouchables. This kind of language, while occasionally heard, is nowadays seldom used, but all the underlying prejudices and discrimination remain intact. If they are despised and oppressed, as they certainly are, this has as much to do with their caste, colour and occupation as it has to do with their religion. This theoretical explanation, however, does not alter the experiential reality. In *their* experience, the people who exploit, abuse and marginalise them are Muslims; and that is their measure of Islam. Even to-day, tribal Hindus and Christian Sweepers will not be served in many a tea-shop. If served, it will be from dirty and inferior cups which are often smashed or discarded after use.

Wealthy Muslims can be quite shocked on realizing that we eat and even stay overnight in Christian sweeper basties and Marwari Hindu villages. In general this has less to do with religion as such, than with their conviction that such behavior is simply demeaning (*be-izzati*). Some years ago three sweepers were drowned in a main sewer by a rush of methane gas while attempting to unblock it. To do this work they have to descend into the sewer, often up to their neck in its contents, sometimes indeed, obliged to submerge themselves to find the problem. Accidents are frequent. It requires little imagination to realize that theirs must have been a horrible death. They had been

ordered to do this work on their day off, no safety equipment had been provided and the job was unsupervised. Their families' claims for compensation were taken up by the Spiritans as a human rights' case. Two of the victims were Massali Muslims and the third was a Christian.

Massali Muslims, the majority of Punjabi Christians and other groups now in India such as Mazhabi Sikhs, all constitute the same ethnic - and originally tribal - group of oppressed people, who converted to various religions at different points in history in search of social inclusion and dignity. Massalis and Christian sweepers eat together, very occasionally intermarry and have the same occupation; ethnically they are the same, although their religion is different. In negotiating their compensation, the authorities were most unhelpful. More than that, the manner in which they spoke of the victims communicated a total lack of respect, almost as if they considered them sub-human. But this was no less the case in relation to the Massalis than in relation to the Christian. Although the former were Muslims, their status in the eyes of the powerful, who were all Muslims, was defined by their occupation and not by their religion: they were sweepers not Muslims!

These experiences undoubtedly colour our perception of Islam as a *lived reality*. Obviously such practices quite clearly fall short of the noble spiritual ideals of Islam and there are many devout Muslims who recognize this. But while notionally religion can be distinguished from culture, once one leaves the pages of a textbook religion exists only in an acculturated form. This is the concrete Islam that the minorities experience. Apart from a numerically small group who have found employment in Saudi Arabia or the Gulf States, it is the only Islam they know.

Presence to Moslems

The Spiritans themselves are, by and large, not overtly subjected to hostility, much less oppression, although they are seen by many religious leaders as representative of a way of life that is inimical to Islam. On the part of many people, we are tolerated rather than accepted. Socially, even if not religiously, we do enjoy a level of acceptance. Although we seek to live simply and may protest our vowed commit-

ment to evangelical poverty, our buildings, cars, foreign travel and apparently limitless resources mark us off as wealthy. This brings its own level of acceptability in a society which is neurotically status-conscious. It also confirms the prejudice that Christianity survives in Pakistan through foreign funding.

At another level, beyond the understandable suspicion and the carefully veiled hostility, there is a kind of grudging admiration, even on the part of some Muslim religious leaders. They see that, for they most part, we wish no one ill and try our best to do good, usually in solidarity with people who are poor and powerless. The admiration is begrudged because such action may point to the gap between Islam's high ideals and the blatant double standards in public life, as well as uncomfortably calling into question the caricature of Christianity often regurgitated in the Friday sermon. For one Muslim friend, professionally very competent and devout in his religion, all that is wrong with us is that we are not Muslims. We behave like good Muslims, we treat others as good Muslims should, but why do we persist in believing in three gods?

If we do not engage in a formal structured dialogue with Islam, we certainly engage in a wide-ranging, on-going dialogue of life with Muslims. The rickshaw *wallah* who wants to overcharge us is a Muslim. The fellow passenger who squeezes up to make room for us to sit in the train when we have no booking, is a Muslim. So is the one who has taken possession of someone else's booking and refuses to budge! The fellow-traveler who shares his food with us is a Muslim. So is the one who refuses to eat ours because we are *kaffirs*. The doctor, who on our introduction, agrees to perform an operation at a reduced rate because the patient is poor, is a Muslim. So is the doctor who refuses to examine another patient because of his caste, colour or occupation. The police officers who harass the people for bribes are Muslims. So is the officer who helps track down the daughter of a *han* (peasant) who has been abducted by the landlord. The landlord, who has abducted and perhaps abused the girl, is a Muslim. A second landlord who gives information as to where the girl may be found is also a Muslim. Sometimes he has helped because he sees the injustice

of the situation and sometimes just because the other landlord is his rival or his enemy. The civil servant whose aim is to make visa applications all but impossible, is a Muslim. The official who smoothes the way even when the papers are not quite in order is also a Muslim. The religious man who proclaims what for him is the self-evident truth, that Christians do not pray, is a Muslim. So is the man who sincerely asks for our prayers for his sick relative or child, who prays with us as we pray, and who departs deeply appreciative.

These then are the contours of our living dialogue with Islam - one that, for the most part, is conducted not with official spokespersons, but with ordinary people. These and dozens more like them we meet every day, many of them on an on-going basis. The conversation is rarely just about the business in hand. Quickly it moves on to topics like what we think of Pakistan, what are we doing here, where are our children, and why we are not Muslims. The level of the exchange varies from the frivolous to the hotly argumentative, and even the potentially dangerous; from the voyeuristic to the honest and serious. The questioning is often indelicate, not all of it is sincere and at times, it seems little short of entrapment. On our part, an initial enthusiasm and naivete have gradually given way to a wariness buttressed by an array of survival strategies.

At times, some of us when aggressively asked what religion we are will reply "*Insan*" (human being), in the hope of avoiding what experience has shown to be fruitless debate and of focusing instead on our common humanity. Learning to humorously deflect ridiculous accusations can sometimes be more fruitful than trying to confront them. Not infrequently, the exchange peters out into the embarrassed silence of incomprehension, as often happens when the interlocutors, warming to a conversation with foreigners in Urdu or Punjabi, discover we are not Muslims! On occasions, the religious difference can be put aside to allow something in the nature of a meeting of hearts, if not of minds. Once in a while, there is a sense that we are together in the presence of God: that since He is One, humanity is also one and our differences are not so absolute.

Dialogue: Formal or Informal?

The group is committed to a dialogue of life. There is no strong desire in the group for dialogue at the more formal level, especially when it comes to exploring historical questions and together with our dialogue partners, pursuing the meaning of disputed canonical texts in either tradition. While such work is obviously necessary, experience indicates that, in this context, it can often be an arid and unproductive venture. There are a number of such initiatives in Pakistan, mostly in the larger cities. Even some of the people most seriously committed to the process cannot escape the impression that much of it is for show, especially when the emphasis seems to be on the personalities involved and the expected festive meal (*bara khana*). Exchanging lofty sentiments and enunciating noble principles while listening with due deference and appreciation is itself a cultural form in Pakistan. It is a matter of *izzat*: of showing and receiving due regard, honour and respect. It does not necessarily betoken a readiness to internalize or act on what has been so courteously exchanged. It often attracts the kind of Muslim who is English-speaking and somewhat sophisticated (or likes to think he is), who likes the company of Europeans or privileged Pakistanis. Many of them would not even consider sitting in the same room as the people who constitute the vast majority of the membership of the Church. Such encounters seem equally unrepresentative of the mass of Pakistani Muslims.

Dialogue with peoples of other religions - as distinct from dialogue with other religions - is a constitutive part of the contemporary understanding of mission and flows naturally from the contemporary Catholic theological principle that the grace offered to humanity in Christ, is offered to those both in and outside the visible Church, so that world religions and indeed all paths of authentic praxis, may be described as ways of salvation, even if there are still some unresolved theological points as to whether or not these ways of salvation are means of salvation. Dialogue, therefore, is constitutive of mission. What is less clear is the appropriate way to engage in it.

In general, the desire for dialogue seems to come from the Christian side. Reflection on the way many Catholics used to think in pre-

Vatican II times will give a good idea of the Muslim attitude. "We are right and you are wrong; ours is the final revelation and yours has been superseded; in any event, you have corrupted your scriptures." No doubt, we appear equally intransigent and incorrigible. This mentality is compounded by their conviction of their religious obligation to convert at least one non-Muslim to Islam, as a way of atoning for all their sins. To this way of thinking, our desire for formal dialogue arises out of weakness in our position and uncertainty as to the truth of our religion. Most Muslims feel no need for what we term "dialogue".

Politeness may allow for sharing and prevent the exchange degenerating into apologetics, but Pakistani Muslims are not wary of dialogue because they think it is a subterfuge for conversion; they already assume that this is exactly what it is, and for the most part, seem to participate in precisely this way themselves. Breaking down such walls of distrust is a slow process. While these kinds of dialogue initiatives certainly have their place, and those who participate in them deserve appreciation, they cannot be the only or even the main strategy for creating a climate of mutual understanding and appreciation.

Our experience of Dialogue

In our experience, the dialogue of life with Muslims is carried out principally in four ways:

(i) Dialogue and Justice:

Firstly, there is the dialogue that *may* follow (neither here nor in any of the other ways to be discussed, does it *necessarily* do so) from a common commitment to a shared struggle for justice and the transformation of unjust socio-political structures. An outstanding example of this is the common commitment on the part of various Muslim groups with the Catholic commission for Justice and Peace, in relation to issues like the Hadood Ordinances and the Separate Electorate. The courage of some women's groups composed of both secularized and religious Muslims has been a source of admiration to many Christians. In such struggles, a new sense of mutual respect and interdependence arises. It becomes impossible to doubt the sincerity and good will of the other. This can, in the case of some individuals and groups, lead on to

a sharing which is a genuine inter-religious dialogue on what justice is considered to be in their respective faiths and, from there, to a deeper religious sharing. There is one group of Christian and Muslim women where this seems to be happening in a fruitful way. Here their corresponding experiences of oppression by the patriarchal structures in their respective religious systems, may also be a spur to sharing.

But it does not always work out that way. People of all religious traditions are welcomed to the workshops organized by the Spiritans on personal and social transformation, using the Freire method. These workshops include a dimension of worship and prayer. Sometimes Muslim participants are very much at home in the sharing. Sometimes when invited to pray or even lead the worship, they retreat into a very sectarian and proselytizing stance.

(ii) Dialogue and work:

Secondly, religious or inter-faith dialogue may become possible among Christians and Muslims who have a daily sharing because of belonging to the same occupation or profession. When the funeral of the Christian drowned in the sewer was celebrated, Massalis came in great numbers. Much preparation had gone into the Liturgy including a special ceremony at the Offertory in an attempt to dignify the honest labour of the sweeper. The Massalis were very touched by this and some joined in the prayers. One Spiritan regularly meets his fellow medical professionals as well as running a clinic in collaboration with a Muslim landlord. The dialogue here is something as between equals, starting at the professional level, moving out into the dialogue of life and, on occasion, touching on religious faith. The fact that many of the dialogue partners are educated and somewhat secularized can allow for a more critical exchange. This may be especially fruitful at the present time, when a new geo-political climate may permit a measure of self-questioning among educated Muslims.

In theory, something of this nature should be possible in situations like schools and hospitals where teachers and nurses may be expected to meet on an equal basis. In general it does not happen in hospitals, not only for reasons of caste, but also because Christian nurses are fre-

quently harassed. But in the educational area there is another reason. The school curriculum has been thoroughly Islamized. The stories in the English language textbook - not to mention the textbooks on Urdu and History - are about Muslim heroes; the science book demonstrates how physics and medicine were Muslim discoveries. The figure of Jesus is presented in totally Muslim terms, even to Christian children who are obliged to study Islamiyat, and who unwittingly accept it as the true picture. Some Christian teachers are appalled by this; others, regrettably, know no better. A minority come to people like us to discuss this situation, but in the school they are obliged to stay silent. Apart from the possibility of prosecution under Blasphemy Law 295C, they need to keep their job in a climate of growing unemployment.

(iii) Dialogue and prayer:

A third way is the dialogue that may arise out of a common commitment to prayer. Indeed a Swiss missionary, who spent his life promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue in Pakistan, concluded that this was the only way! Whatever about their understanding of what prayer is, Pakistani Muslims show that they have a keen sense of its importance and its centrality in their lives. In general they are very pleased and even impressed to discover that we pray. But praying together is seldom, if ever, a formally structured or regular thing. Religious practice in Pakistan, among all faiths, is more a matter of occasional felt need than of regularity. Often when visiting Christian patients in hospital, we will be asked by Muslims to pray for their sick relative and even lay hands on the patient. This is sincerely appreciated.

Occasionally, people will call at the door asking for prayers for themselves or a relative. The expectation is that we will pray there and then. In rare cases they will ask for some rite typical of a Muslim *pir* (holy man) such as breathing over a glass of water and giving it to them to drink. In times of need or distress, Pakistanis, and perhaps most human beings, revert to a very inclusive notion of religion. They will go to every or any place of worship or religious figure. The governing factor is the supposed efficacy of his prayers and not the orthodoxy or otherwise, of his beliefs.

This is typical of the *pan thic* (following a person or movement) as distinct from the *dharmic* (system of belief and ethics) form of religion, so popular among the ordinary people of Indo-Pakistan. Two of the Spiritans, while touring the villages of interior Sindh with a view to finding a suitable location for a third Spiritan community, frequently participated in sessions of common worship lasting late into the night, following the *Bhagti* model of devotional singing. Such inter-religious worship and explicit inter-religious dialogue with popular Hinduism is very much an on-going part of the life of the group here in Pakistan, even if exploring it further lies outside the scope of the present article. In Sindh, they discovered that Muslims too join in this kind of worship. In some cases, it seemed there was a real meeting of hearts; a joint journey towards the one God who is beyond all religious constructions and can be known only through love and devotion. On the morning following one such session, a Muslim who had shared in the devotions came with tea for the Spiritans to show his appreciation for their participation - but he would not let the Hindus drink from the same cups! The Spiritans departed with many questions.

(iv) Dialogue and life:

The fourth form of dialogue is the one which runs through these pages: the dialogue of life that follows (or does not follow, depending on the circumstances) from the ordinary involvements of daily life. Behind all the roles, we are human beings and, in some cases at least, it is possible to meet at this level. The reality of religious faith lies less in the theoretical systems that seek to explain or justify it than in its capacity to facilitate meaning, motivation and transformation in the struggles of daily life. Inter-religious faith sharing is less about harmonizing the details of these systems, than about sharing the ground and source of this meaning and linking with its dynamism and capacity for transformation in all its graciousness and mysteriousness. Theology, for all its undoubted importance, is a secondary activity which rises at sunset. What it purports to speak of is found not primarily in its own syntheses, but in the ultimately irrepressible capacity for solidarity, reconciliation

and common decency which signals salvation in the face of all that threatens the human project. The religious encounter with the "other" is the condition of escaping from the prison of illusion that imagines one's own system to be complete and self-contained. This encounter therefore contains the seeds of an enriched and expanded humanity. Focusing on the other's religion may, ironically, be the very way to ensure that one never encounters *him*.

Islamisation by Osmosis

Dialogue with Islam takes place in an indirect way within the Christian Church itself. So all-pervasive is Islam, even in the lives of non-Muslims, that the process of cultural osmosis results in a form and understanding of Christianity that is deeply shaped by Islamic values and presuppositions. Thus Jesus is "our prophet" and, sad to say, sometimes only that. Christmas is our *Eid*. We are *Ahl-ul-kitaab* (people of the book) and so the word or the primary revelation is the *injl* (gospel), misunderstood as the *book* of the New Testament and not Jesus himself. Inevitably this means that the text is read and proclaimed in a literal and fundamentalist way. Sometimes indeed it is read in a quasi-magical way; it is enough that it be read: comprehension or interpretation is irrelevant. The book is given a place of honour, often placed on the highest point in the living-room. In itself this is touching; but often what lies behind the gesture can be counter-productive of genuine ecclesial life

This emphasis on the book has resulted in an extremely impoverished Eucharistic sense. The Spiritans have worked hard to redress this, organizing seminars and developing catechetical models, but it remains an uphill struggle. People long for cut-and-dried answers to questions like: "what is our Shariat,"(law) "How do we observe *roza*" (fasting, i.e., Lent)? "What is our *kal ma*" (confession)? "How often should we pray"? Some years ago in Peshawar there was a movement to begin a Christian *Taliban*! One of its organizers found his way into one of our seminars, taking copious notes during every session. Inter-religious dialogue through the looking-glass!

These attitudes are not limited to the uneducated. They are hardly dented by several years of seminary philosophy and theology. One Pakistani Bishop recently published an article proposing that Christians observe the Lenten fast as Muslims practise theirs. Some years ago, the one and only Christian Government Minister not only defended the Blasphemy Laws, but suggested the harmonization of the Muslim and Christian feasts. Addressing these issues is not a once-off thing. Year after year the same questions crop up. Our efforts at dialogue speak to the minds of our people and occasionally to their hearts, but a different message is being absorbed so continually and so unconsciously as to be totally internalized. Some enthusiasts for inter-religious harmony may find in such tendencies a very positive note. But clarity as to its faith identity is absolutely crucial to the very survival of a tiny religious minority. Otherwise Christians in Pakistan will be known only by their caste and the Christian faith reduced to the poor man's Islam.

At the same time, what we imagine to be Christian symbols can sometimes speak deeply to Muslims. The statue of Our Lady next to one of the churches staffed by Spiritans was a much-frequented place of prayer for many Muslim women. They would place their *dupatta* (scarf or shawl - and a culturally important symbol of modesty and honour) around the statue as an act of veneration and devotion to *Hazrat Maryam* - whom they greatly esteem. Usually this would be done as either a pledge or a thanksgiving for a grace received, often related to the birth of a son. Shared veneration of Mary may well be a rich and untapped source of Muslim-Christian dialogue.

Because Christian sweepers work in the nether world of domestic waste of all kinds, they are believed by some Muslims to have special intercessory powers with the demons who are believed to inhabit the nether world of spirits. This is a carryover from very ancient attitudes found in folk Hinduism. In one sweeper *bastie* we know very well, Muslims, including rich ones, sometimes come from considerable distances for prayers from the Christians for deliverance from what they believe are evil spirits. There is a negative side to all this too for in some cases, people come looking for black magic (*kala ilm*) to use against real or supposed enemies. Here we find ourselves not only in

Muslim-Christian dialogue but in dialogue with our own theological tradition, as well as with the limitations of the psychological construction of behaviour so much taken for granted in western spirituality.

Islam is not monolithic

If these pages do not present a simple and easily definable form of dialogue with Islam, that is because Islam in Pakistan is itself a complicated social reality. From³ a distance it may seem monolithic but not from up close. This affects both the way we experience it and the way we respond to it in concrete lived situations.

(i) Muslim sects:

At a first level there is the difference between Sunni and Shia. This can run deep, not infrequently leading to violence and atrocities. The western press may publish an account of a terrorist attack in a Christian place of worship when it involves American casualties but similar atrocities occur far more often between Sunnis and Shias. The attacks are the work of unrepresentative extremists and there are many recorded cases of ordinary people helping the victims irrespective of their denomination.

Popular Shi'ism is effectively regarded as heretical by fundamentalist Sunnis who form 80% of Pakistani Muslims. Shias for their part, due to their fervent devotion to the sufferings of Hussein, often seem to have a deeper insight into the Christian understanding of the vicarious suffering of Jesus. Their Muharram procession is a spectacular event drawing massive crowds, closely guarded by the police and even the army, to prevent disturbances. Poor Christians sometimes participate, even whipping themselves to draw blood. Some do it because they are paid by rich Shias; others because of the fascination of the spectacle. Here too there is a fruitful occasion for dialogue. But conversing with members of each group is a very different experience. In particular, one learns not to seek to explain denominational differences in Christianity by analogy with this division.

There are other sects too: the Ishmaelis with whom dialogue at least in relation to common social projects, is more straightforward; the Ahmadians or Quaidianis, declared non-Muslims with minority status by Bhutto as a strategy to win the support of the Maulvis. These are persecuted far worse than Christians or Hindus. Their experience of oppression has made them somewhat sympathetic to minorities.

(ii) Secularists and Fundamentalists:

At another level, there is the difference between the minority of secularists and the fundamentalist majority. It does not seem inaccurate to describe the majority as fundamentalist as indeed it is, from a doctrinal or apologetic point of view. In Pakistan, this term does not simply equate with the far right: those are the extremists who until recently, were quite openly recruited for armed struggle in various theatres of war and terror. A general amorphous fundamentalism simply reflects the history of the people, the ghettoized nature of the society and the regrettable drop in educational standards. "Secularism" is hardly an appropriate term: what is really involved is a process of modernization and urbanization as well as the beginning of a capitalist economy side by side with the feudal structure. When Pakistan recently returned to having Sunday as its day of rest, the move was motivated solely by the desire not to lose a day's trading on the stock exchange.

What secularism there may be is, for the most part, to be found among the educated urban middle class, a class which, to begin with, is not numerically significant. But the process which produced it is constantly growing in influence due not least, to the increasing presence of multi-channel TV, videos and Internet, in all of which young Pakistanis show a passionate interest. The urban youth has a deeply felt but unreflected religious sense as well as a passionate desire to be part of the Coca-Cola culture. If India is anything to go by, this may well produce two diverging and ultimately divisive social forces: one in the direction of a cruder religious fundamentalism and the other in the direction of a consumerist secularism.

This distorts the project of inter-religious dialogue. Since Islam itself is integralist, many Muslims simply equate Christian faith-culture and the

western ideology of global capitalism with its implied definition of existence as consumerism. In a bizarre way, this can actually fit in with traditional notions of divine blessing as material plenty - as it seems to do in North America as well. Such 'secularized' Muslims eagerly seek out conversation with us, assuming that because we are Christians (i.e. Westerners), this will be our value system too. This same divergence manifests itself in the different attitudes to us following the extensive bombing of neighbouring Afghanistan by the U.S.A. In the eyes of those of a fundamentalist persuasion, we are at one with those who murderously bombed civilians and killed their Muslim brothers. In the eyes of those who see the future in alignment with the "full spectrum dominance" of the Pentagon, we are assumed to share in this adventurism.

(iii) Popular religiosity:

One reason why our dialogue is advisedly with *Muslims* as distinct from with *Islam*, is because of the very real gulf between the Islam of the Mosque and the lived religion of the people. When pressed in religious matters, all, of course, will deny this and give the approved answers. Indeed part of the socio-cultural genius of Islam is its ability to reduce the essentials of its belief system down to bare essentials that just about everybody can learn. (Many Christians in Pakistan can recite the *kalma* but not the Apostles' Creed)! But inter-religious dialogue, when real, is between the *practitioners* of two *living* religious systems. Below the surface of the official religion is the popular Islam of the people and, it may be stressed, not only of the poor and uneducated!

Ethnographically, it could be described as the Islamisation of village Hinduism. It is a form of religion concerned with blessing in this life. Its aim is to win God's favour in the shape of blessings such as a male child, or some material advancement, or deliverance from illness usually understood to have been caused by an evil spirit or by an enemy's curse. This can be obtained by the intercession of a *pir* or holy man. He may actually be a living *pir* with some claim to holiness, or he may be the descendent of one, whose own life exhibits no spiritual sensibility but in whom the original, divinely bestowed spiritual power

is still presumed to reside. It may be a matter of visiting the tomb of such a *pir*. When the victorious Pakistan cricket team returned home after winning the World Cup, they gave public thanks to God, but they did so by going to the tomb of the *pir* Data Ganj Baksh, the patron saint of Lahore - not to a mosque!

In some cases there are prescribed rituals such as dervish-like dancing. In others it is a matter of making an offering. Sometimes, without travelling anywhere, a supplicant will cook a large cauldron of rice (deg) in honour of a *pir* or even in honour of God. This popular religion extends to knowing which name of God to recite in pursuit of which blessing. There are books explaining this in detail: what name to use during sexual intercourse when a male child is desired; what name to ensure fame and fortune; what name to utter in order to triumph over one's enemies. The would-be agent of dialogue may be comparing theological Islam with theological Christianity - or even some preferred systematized version of each - when all the time he is speaking to someone whose religious sensibilities and practice are rooted elsewhere.

One may meet a man on a train. After an exchange of greetings, general conversation about the Pakistan cricket team, the obligatory complaints about Pakistan Railways and polite inquiries into the health of our respective families, he may express his worry about the nervous disposition of his daughter. If it is a genuine worry, how will one engage with him? Allow him to speak and express his concerns and one gradually discovers that he - and his daughter - fear the injurious influence of evil spirits. His speech and dress show him to be educated but indicate little of his inner world. By now he has figured out that his conversation partner is some kind of Christian missionary - what other *Angrez* (European) dresses in *Shalwar-Qamiz* (Pakistani shirt and pajamas), speaks Urdu and travels all night in a train. How to respond? Give him the best of western psychology and explain it all away? He may be duly impressed but his daughter will still be troubled and so will he!

Is this inter-religious dialogue and, if so, what has one's *religion* to say to this man's real predicament - which he constructs in religious terms? One begins to tentatively speak of how *Hazrat Isa* was renowned for

casting out evil spirits, and one sees his interest growing. He tells you he has heard something about that. You have now entered his world - one perhaps where Jesus was there before you. The sharing continues. You tell him to call on the name of *Hazrat Isa* with all his heart and soul and no evil spirit can ever harm him or his. There seems to be real recognition in his face as he gratefully nods agreement. One has all the western-educated person's reservations about the very notion of a spirit world, one has referred to the One in whom one believes, by a term which theologically, falls far short of what one believes Him to be. But one has tried to encounter someone in the place where that person is at, the only possible place one can encounter him. Is this Christian-Muslim dialogue?

(iv) Sufism:

Pakistani Muslims will fight to the death to defend the Islam of the book and the Mosque, yet apart from the Maulvis and the shop-keeping class, this is the Islam only of their official selves. The Islam of their hearts is the religion of the Sufis. To dialogue with Islam in Pakistan is to dialogue with Sufism. This is the Islam of mystical longing, the Islam of personal interior experience. This is an Islam characterized not by legalistic observance, but by the sheer delight in seeking and worshipping the God who dwells not in mosques or temples or books, but in the human heart. While this is the popular form of Islam, it would be quite inaccurate to categorize it solely as popular religiosity. It is mystical theology of the highest order, including practical guidelines for the stages of prayer by which one enters into deep personal communion with God. Many of the great Indo-Pakistani Sufis were also poets. Their poetry communicates a finely chiseled and even startling truth of expression of religious experience, a crystal-clear sincerity devoid of pretension about what it is to hunger for the one true God who is beyond all religious constructions and who can be known and possessed in ecstatic love by the true disciple who is prepared to seek Him single mindedly.

At a popular level, this is the Islam which appeals to the common man in its deconstruction of the claims of official religion and its self-

important representatives. It is a form of Islam which democratizes holiness: one's religion is only as real as one's actual experience of God. It also provides the basis of one important part of social life in the festivals or *melas* that are organized around the tombs of the great Sufi saints now become the *pirs*, who mediate the *concretely* salvific presence of the divine. It would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of these events in the actual religious life of the people. Hindus and Christians will also be found there, especially poor people. If there is ever to be a relevant and transformative form of inter-religious dialogue in Pakistan, this will be one of its starting-points. That, in turn, will point towards a Church more interested in the mystical than the monetary, surely a fruitful point of departure.

These Sufis are also celebrated in popular music and the great exponents of this style of singing seem themselves to have something of the Sufi thirst for personal communion with God. On a long bus journey, one may quite literally hear hours of this music blasted out over the speaker. There is a very particular form of dialogue with Islam involved in listening to the great mystical poems of the Sufis, passionately sung with the abandon of a rock star or the raucousness of a balladeer. One is brought close to the heart of Pakistani Islam and of all true devotion. God is real; there is nothing more real: He can be known and loved by the heart that truly seeks Him. In this there is the joy that no one can take from us.

(v) Muslims oppressing Muslims:

Pakistani Muslims, contrary to a strong ideological stress on unity which is always reaffirmed in the face of outside opposition, are by no means a single sociological entity - even apart from obvious ethnic differences. A very small number of Pakistani Muslims are wealthy and powerful while the mass of Pakistani Muslims are poor and powerless. There is a direct causal relation between the wealth of the former and the poverty of the latter. Only under the dictatorship of Gen. Ayub Khan were the foundations for a capitalist economy laid and economic historians write of the vast enrichment of twenty-two client families during that period. Massive underemployment ensures very low wages.

Apart from that, it remains a feudal society in which a tiny proportion of the population (the *zamindar* class) has grown extremely rich by defrauding the huge population of *haris* (peasant sharecroppers) of the considerable surplus value of their labour. Most of these *haris* are Muslims. Obviously such injustice is contrary to the Islamic ideals of justice, but these ideals never seem to translate into practice, just as the social teaching of the Church can denounce injustice and poverty but apparently do little enough to eliminate them.

Muslims react in different ways to this situation. For a minority, it is proof positive of the need for a more extreme form of Islamic political order backed up, if necessary, by armed force. The rapprochement of Iran with the West and the fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan have lessened the appeal of this kind of dangerous dreaming, but it continues to captivate a minority of extremists. For the majority, the oppression has been so deeply internalized and the generations, even centuries of living in the shadow of the *zamindar*, have so dulled the consciousness of the oppressed, that it is fatalistically accepted as normal, as the way of life sanctioned by God. Their lot is the will of God: *Khuda ki merzi*. Since the local mosque may well have been paid for by the *zamindar*, the maulvi is already co-opted, his preaching unknowingly a legitimization of the system.

Dialogue in this situation is extremely difficult: what does the *zamindar* need to dialogue about? Direct confrontation is next to impossible. The power of the feudal lord is almost absolute. He may even have his own gaol. The local police superintendent and district commissioner and member of parliament may well be his relations and will certainly be beholden to him in many ways. Some missionaries, in collaboration with Pakistani Human Rights' groups, have succeeded, at no small cost to themselves, in freeing some of the *haris* reduced to slavery - but only to discover that for many of them, there is simply nowhere else to go. Programmes on awareness raising and adult literacy continue and certainly dialogue with this situation. But raised awareness of oppression can be a painful experience when next to nothing can be done in the short term about removing the causes of the oppression. Sometimes the most that can be attempted is a different self-concept in the coming generation.

(vi) One God: but what kind of God?

Declarations from dialogue groups tend to stress what is held in common, most especially that we both believe in one God. But a key issue for inter-religious dialogue then is what kind of god He really is and, in particular, whether oppressive dehumanization could really be His will. The issue is easily dealt with in the lecture hall but not so easily in the lives of the downtrodden, where resignation to a greater power than the *zamindar* may, for many, be the one and only way to put some shape on their ultimately inevitable suffering.

At a theological level, to describe (and it is so described!) such a shameful way of allowing people to be oppressed as *Khuda ki merzi* (the will of God) and to teach others to do the same amounts to a denial of God's desire to give His people life. Yet in the rawness of the life of the oppressed, there is an expression of *Khuda ki merzi* on the part of the brokenhearted, faced with a grief that brooks no rationalisation, which verbalises a deep and faith-filled resignation to the mysterious providence of God. But that is a far cry from the same words uttered with empty formality by a religious leader, whether priest or maulvi, or cynically by an apologist for the system of oppression, none of whom is really serious about engaging either with the cause or subsequent prevention of this cruelty.

The lived experience

There is no doubt that we are deeply affected by the experience of living and working over many years in such a totally encompassing yet extremely complex Islamic environment. It is tempting to go for the easy and politically correct summation of this experience and simply write about how it has enriched us. While *it certainly has enriched us*, there are so many dimensions to this multi-layered experience that without mentioning some of them, we scarcely do justice either to the complexity of this situation or to our experience of on-going dialogue within it

(i) Overwhelmed:

At one level it is simply overwhelming. As another missionary once put it, "It tames you." It is simply bigger and stronger and more vast than anything any praxis or combination of strategies can get a handle on. One has to come to terms with this: to accept one's situation of minority, to accept to be second and pretty far down the line at that; to accept to be small and to count hardly at all. We and all the minorities follow Muslim feasts, observe Islamic dietary restrictions, use Islamic terminology, hear the Friday sermon on the loudspeakers whether we want to or not. We and our co-religionists have to accept to be called *Isai* even though we are *Masih*. It is relentless and self-assured and unapologetic.

The loudspeakers that blast the call to prayer from every mosque (and there is at least one at every street corner) seem to take a particular delight in aiming the transmission at the houses and *basties* of Christians. (One often wonders if the situation were reversed would Christians do exactly the same thing). They presumably think they are doing a good deed, proclaiming God's word and offering salvation to the lost. We are small and insignificant and although there is a great strength involved in coming to know and accept this, a lot of familiar supports have to be relinquished first. December 25th is a public holiday because of the birthday of Jinnab. The first Good Friday lived in a Muslim country is an extraordinary experience. Life proceeds as if Christ had not died for humanity, as indeed he has not, according to their ideology. In this way our presence to Islam facilitates an interior dialogue within oneself, a coming to terms with the sheer contingency of human existence and the radical poverty of creatureliness - perhaps in its own way, a condition for any kind of dialogue.

While missionaries, precisely because they are perceived as good-living foreigners - and wealthy to boot - are spared the undisguised hostility shown to ordinary Christians and Hindus, the hostility that hides behind what is sometimes feigned politeness and sometimes genuine acceptance occasionally explodes on to the surface. The church in Rahim Yar Rhan has been attacked and desecrated as has the church in Khanewal; the Christian village of Shantinagar has been

burned down; there have been massacres of worshipping Christians in Bahawalpur and Islamabad; several Christians have been sentenced to death under the blasphemy laws. It would be misleading to suggest that this kind of behaviour represents the totality or even the majority of Muslims. It does not! Nor is it solely directed against Christians. Similar atrocities are perpetrated by Sunnis and Shias against each other. But it would be equally misleading to pretend that it cannot or does not happen. It can and it does! Our presence to this aspect of the world of Islam is not without an element of apprehension, yet here too, there is a graced invitation to accept that life is a gift and ultimately not our own possession.

(ii) Tolerated:

“Tolerance” is an ambiguous term. To say we are tolerated can mean we are *merely* tolerated, not accepted for what we are, not really welcome. Of course this does not apply only to the tolerance of Muslims. Many sections of the Christian community accept the missionary not for what he is, but for what benefits his presence may bring. Yet it is no small thing that missionaries are tolerated in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. They are not given entry to Hindu India or Buddhist Sri Lanka, despite the claims of both the latter to be secular states. In however hedged and restricted a manner, Pakistani Islam does nonetheless recognize that there is a Christian minority in the country, that it does have a right to practise its religion and manage its own religious institutions. Far, far fewer missionaries have been murdered in Pakistan than in India. At the religious level, there is at least some recognition that Christians too are *Ahl -al-K itaab* and that their religion is worthy of some respect. This may seem like little. But it is their country, not ours. That however, is the missionary perspective. Pakistan is also the homeland of its minorities: on the basis of their testimony, they are not made to *feel* that it is.

There is a deeper dimension to this tolerance and that is the sense of hospitality of the people. Until you are known, you are a stranger; but when you are known, there is a welcome. Culturally, this follows from the value that it is honourable to receive a visitor with proper respect.

This value is deeply held. The generosity with which it is expressed can sometimes humble us and invite us to a more inclusive solidarity in our own lives.

(iii) Enriched:

If there is one facet of Islam that continually enriches our lives it is its non-negotiable and relentless confession of the absolute transcendence and sovereignty of God. "There is no god but God!" (*La ilah illa 'illah*). Religion itself is not God, no experience of God is God, nor is the Church or any of its laws or traditions. All our plans and programmes and experiences and ambitions are partial and limited and ultimately expendable. Only God is God! While there remains the theological question of what kind of god is the God who alone is God, this first part of the *kalma* does serve as a tool to purge the idolatrous from our never-ending tendency to domesticate religion, to construct it in our likeness rather than allow God to be God!

With this enrichment comes a second one: the invitation to submit to the sovereignty of God which is perhaps the heart of *Islam* understood spiritually and theologically. For a Christian then, to live *Islam* in this foundational sense would be to submit oneself unreservedly to the God revealed in the event of Jesus of Nazareth. This of course is a very different thing from an Islamisation of our faith life, turning grace into *shariat* and worship into observance. It is rather a matter of taking the unconditional, but always utterly mysterious, love of God made visible in Jesus of Nazareth with the same absolute seriousness and submission that Muslims show before the name of Allah.

Observing the devout Muslim at prayer, whether in the standard way, or in some of the practices of devout popular religiosity - such as standing together in the mosque and chanting *Allah-u* (God is!) rhythmically as they beat their breasts, raising the tone and the speed of recitation to a dervish-like state of ecstasy - is to see people for whom the reality of God is something to be taken with absolute seriousness. This speaks to, enriches and challenges our faith life, especially the tendency towards the subjectification, if not the elimination, of religion in the contemporary West. To speak to or with such people about

religious faith inevitably implies an examination and deepening of one's own. Before ever we embark on the path of dialogue, Islam is speaking to us and facilitating an interior dialogue within us. Visitors to Pakistan have rediscovered buried dimensions of their own faith in observing the faith of Pakistani Muslims.

(iv) Addressed:

While largely dismissive of art as in song, dance and figurative painting, there is nonetheless an aesthetic side to Pakistani Islam, especially in calligraphy and architecture. As in its devotional life, Islam speaks to us here too. The exquisite architecture of the mosque at Bhong near Rahim Yar Khan and the Sufi shrines in Multan communicate a deeply religious message. The very use of space and proportion is itself, without any words, an unmistakable testimony to the transcendent presence of the sacred. Visiting these places constitutes a form of dialogue with Islam: they do speak, even if wordlessly, and one is in no doubt about the invitation to listen in silent wonder. It is not an easy art to practise. Loyalty and fidelity to the tiny and oppressed Christian minority can have the implication of not indulging ourselves in forms of appreciation of Islamic life that they may see as manifestations of its politically oppressive power.

This is a religious culture where revelation is text and the divine is beyond representation. Calligraphic art in Pakistani Islam allows elaborate, intricate but still unadorned lettering in the Urdu script to be capable of communicating the presence of the mysterious and the divine. Gradually, this is making its way into Christian art as well. Along with an Irish missionary, Spiritans have encouraged one young artist in developing calligraphy in such a way as to present verses from the Christian Scriptures in shapes that communicate the religious experience behind the verse. Examples are *Khuda muhubat hai* (God is love), calligraphed in the shape of a triangle to communicate God's tri-unity, or *Alkluia* in the form of a circle to indicate God's infinity. This is the fruit of another kind of dialogue which arguably speaks to deeper levels of consciousness than the more formal kind of verbal exchange - all the more so because great art endures.

Hearing the *azan* is a mixed experience. Usually it comes in the form of an aggressive cacophony from the loudspeakers of any number of Mosques at the same time. Under these circumstances, it is difficult to experience it as a call to prayer. Sometimes it seems to come from a tape-recorded message, or it is given out by a young boy, or there is an edge of weariness or even aggression in the Maulvi's voice. These occasions can elicit a mixture of annoyance and sympathy: annoyance at the empty formalism that always seems to eat into official religion of whatever hue; sympathy, at the realization that the Maulvi's ministry must sometimes seem as unrewarding as our own, that he too faces an uphill struggle in summoning people to faith. What he stands for is respected, but he himself is feared and is the butt of many jokes. The scenario is not unfamiliar.

Sometimes there is a single call: the tone is appealing, the words are clear, the voice seems sincere. The cultural prejudice breaks down; one actually does hear within oneself a call to prayer. "*Allah-u-akhbar*" (God is great) for once seems not a crude appeal for God to justify cultural superiority, or even brute force, but a faith-filled proclamation that God *is* indeed great, that His compassion and forgiveness are *great*, that His designs for humankind are great. Some of the group consciously try to so experience the *azan* - and especially the *fajar ka bhang* (call to dawn prayers) - as an invitation to pray and to be one with our Muslim sisters and brothers before the greatness of God.

(v) Invited:

Many of us feel invited to enter more deeply into this world. Islam remains for us an object of on-going reflection, study and engagement. Some of the group have attended courses on Islam. The group has twice organized its annual study session around Islamic theology, inviting competent speakers to animate the sessions. Articles in the newspapers on Islam are read and at one period, were avidly discussed. Most of the books on Islam that we read seem to have been written by Christian scholars. Many of those written by Pakistani scholars seem apologetic and propagandist, though ethnographic studies somewhat less so. There is a gap here in our experience but so far it has not been easy to

fill it. A five-volume work written here in Pakistan by a Dutch missionary islamologist (regrettably never published) provides one source for on-going investigations. There is still much to learn. Yet we may not allow ourselves to forget that our ministry does have a specific focus, and however much the imperative of religious dialogue with the people of Islam asserts itself, we have made a preferential option to accompany two marginalized groups from the minority communities. That is our mission. A dialogue of life with Muslims co-defines its context.

Conditions for dialogue

Christian-Muslim dialogue may be expected at some stage in its development to come up against the great questions of Trinity, Incarnation, Cross and Redemption -the symbols of Christian faith which Islam so vehemently denies. In concluding this article, it might be worthwhile to dwell for a moment on the conditions of the possibility of meaningfully exploring these great areas of our faith in a situation of dialogue.

Trinity proclaims that God is not simply unity in the sense of infinite monarchy but a dynamic communion of self-emptying, tri-personal love. Incarnation suggests that the pre-existent word - not altogether unknown to Islam - has pitched its tent in the very fragility of the human with all its vulnerability. The Cross announces the concrete shape of unlimited divine love as a participation in the pathic structure of human existence. The very notion of Redemption proposes that the structure of divine salvation is not merely declarative; nor does goodness triumph by political victory, but by bearing within itself the consequences of evil.

The question then is what kind of church can speak of these mysteries of its faith in a manner that is not simply religious ideology? A church no longer focused on its institutional power, but a servant of human communion and solidarity; a church that refuses to retreat into a cycle of mere self-perpetuation but never ceases to pitch its tent among suffering humanity; a church that is prepared to suffer and become small in fidelity to the project of love; a church that will choose to

serve rather than control and will risk its very self so that many may have life.

Perhaps part of the purpose of a living dialogue with Islam in a situation of minority, vulnerability and oppression is to learn to become a church like this.

¹ The population is now estimated at 140 Million. Most of the remainder divides roughly equally between Hindus and Christians. Among the latter, Protestants and Catholics are about equal in number. There are also tiny percentages of Parsees, Buddhists and Sikhs.

² Often mistranslated as "caste," varna (lit. colour) refers to the racially based fourfold class structure of ancient Indo-Pakistan which survives to this day.

³ In fact it is more complicated still. Here we give the trends or patterns we have experienced over the years. One could easily cite individual exceptions - sometimes very striking ones.

"He who has killed one innocent soul, it is as if he has killed all humanity"
(Koran 5:32)

"You have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgement. But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgement; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be liable to the hell of fire" (Matt 5: 21-22).

ALGERIA: GETTING TO KNOW ISLAM

René You

Apart from six years as provincial Vicar in France and two years of Arabic and Islamic studies in Rome, René You has spent the rest of his time as a Spiritan working in the Muslim environment of Algeria. Since he first went there in 1964 up to the present day, he has lived through a period of radical and often traumatic change, both as regards the political and social situation and the nature of the Christian witness in that country. In this brief presentation for the Banjul meeting, he reflects on the difficulty of acquiring an honest and objective knowledge of Islam but nevertheless sees signs of hope for the future coming from both sides.

It is said that there has been a great surge of interest in the Muslim religion since the drama of September 11th; the Coran and other books about Islam became bestsellers. And the media have given great coverage to this phenomenon, probably with some exaggeration.

But alas, just as the reading of the Bible or the Gospels alone will hardly give an in-depth appreciation of the Jewish or Christian faith, so a reading of the Koran will not bring a very accurate idea of what goes to make up the life of a Muslim. It is also evident that despite their usefulness, summaries as well as more learned studies can give no more than a simplistic view of the Muslim faith to the uninitiated. In fact, there is a considerable risk that booklets will simply confirm a simplistic appraisal and that more serious works could leave us with the feeling that a Muslim is the subject of a whole range of prejudices.

The word "Islamologie" can introduce a multitude of misunderstandings. The basic initiation that many Christians and even priests have experienced of Islam can give a poor and even disturbing picture of what a Muslim is like. I had this experience myself when first appointed to Algeria, armed only with a few inadequate classes in the seminary devoted to non-Christian religions. I also had to beware of the

effects of more serious studies of Islam done later at the PISAI in Rome: how many confident statements and generalizations on the subject had to be re-examined in the light of daily living with the concrete reality of Islam!

But please do not misunderstand me. It is obvious that every effort made to understand the other person, however modest it might be, is the start of a process towards a better appreciation of Muslims and a study of the sources and history that have formed Islam. In passing, note that there is no French equivalent of the word "islamologie". And as far as I know, the words "christianologie" and "christianismologie" do not exist. Perhaps it would help if they did, but on the other hand, life teaches us to beware of categorical affirmations, especially when they are applied exclusively to religion. I often have to stop a Muslim in conversation when he states that "Christians say that...", countering with my own statement of "Muslims say that Christians say that...". But I sometimes do the same thing myself and merit the rejoinder that "Christians say that Muslims say that...", even when I am convinced that my own statement is based on my solid knowledge of Islamologie.

One of the great blessings of this life-experience is gradually to lose a whole mass of prejudices: and even if we are considered, to a certain extent, as "specialists" in inter-religious relationships, we must guard against looking at the Muslim uniquely from the religious point of view. If we allow ourselves to be obsessed by religion, we run the risk of succumbing to the temptation to resurrect the spirit of the crusades.

There were many sickening declarations of respect and esteem for Islam while bombs were falling on Iraq and Afghanistan and young Palestinians were receiving live bullets in exchange for their stones. This is simply to mislead opinion on what is at stake in the present crisis.

In the new partition of the world that has followed on the pulling down of the Berlin wall, those pushed aside by globalisation again feel humiliated and frustrated. If most of them disapprove of the recent terrorist actions, many are talking of the disappointments and rancor that have led to these actions, words spoken not only against the

countries of the West but also against their own leaders who support them and who are often corrupt.

So where can an ally be found? Is there a stronger ally than God himself? And where can one find a certainty that is more radical and sure than in this "wahhabism" which leans on a fundamentalist and intransigent understanding of the foundational writings of the faith and has signed a pact with the sword so that trust and justice may eventually triumph? It would seem obvious that force and humiliation are quite incapable of bringing such destructive fanaticism to an end; it is much more likely to make it worse. This is the firm conviction of most of our Muslim friends, sadly torn between feelings of revolt and a deep desire for peace.

Christians are hardly in a position to give lectures on the difficult problems of the inspiration of Scriptures, the meaning to be given to Tradition, and the thorny problems of the relationship between morality and religion, between politics and religion, and between religions themselves.

The trials we have experienced in recent years in Algeria have reinforced our belief that only a genuine solidarity lived from day to day in disinterested service of others, friendly meetings and the witness of a confident relationship with God are able to win credibility and contribute to the building of modest bridges across the abyss of centuries of misunderstanding. And I feel that what is true at the level of individuals is also valid in the context of communities. If there is no solidarity, material support and respectful intellectual and cultural exchanges, if bombs and military parades are not quickly replaced by schools and progress, if there is not an end to the humiliation felt by Arabs, Muslims and even Christians throughout the world, by the embargo on Iraq and the indifference to the lot of the people of Palestine, then there is every reason to fear more acts of despair.

Without pontificating, the Churches, stimulated by the declaration of Vatican II on religious liberty and dialogue with other religions, should display their confidence in the Spirit of God in reaching out to the world of today. It seems to me that Muslims, often very worried that

they will lose their identity - and even their souls - by contact with the modern world, would be happy to share such an approach. And our own Churches have to shake off the fear that they will lose something of themselves by striding out to meet the world of the 21st century. Peter would not have gone out to meet Cornelius if he had been so wrapped up in his Scriptures and Tradition that he could not hear the call of the Holy Spirit.

The challenge for today and tomorrow is to make sure that our world does not divide into two camps, into a cold or hot war that some would like to see laid upon the two great monotheistic religions. There are plenty of insidious murmurings in that direction. It is essential that people commit themselves for life to fraternal meetings that are free and constructive. Communion is possible if differences are respected and our coming together is marked by genuine trust and fidelity. And without going back on the image of the bridge-builder used above, it is the only way to drive a wedge into the insolent certainty of the most hardened fanatics.

Having said all this, it would be foolish to believe that we can sort out a problem that has existed for the last 14 centuries! But many Muslims, deeply worried about the divisions and dreaming of a future of peaceful dialogue, quote this passage from the Sourate V, verse 48: *"If God had wanted it, he could have made you into one community. But he wanted to test you by the gift he has given you"*. And the Church affirmed in "Lumen Gentium", that *"the plan of salvation equally includes those who recognise the Creator, above all the Muslims who profess to have the faith of Abraham, who adore, as we do, the one merciful God who will judge all men and women on the last day"* (L.G. 16).

How can we not look forward to better times in the light of such sentiments?

ZANZIBAR: A PASTORAL EXPERIENCE OF DIALOGUE

Augustine Shao

Augustine was appointed Bishop of Zanzibar in 1997, having previously served as Provincial of the East African Province. The island was the first place where Catholic missionaries (Spiritans) landed in East Africa in the 19th century. The origins of Islam in East Africa are very different to the implantation on the western side of the continent, and consequently inter-religious relationships have taken a somewhat different path. Augustine explains how a pastoral concentration on education in a wide sense has led to many unexpected religious and social developments, including a greater openness of the two religions towards each other.

A view of Zanzibar

Zanzibar is comprised of the two Islands of Unguja and Pemba, together with several small islets. It is an integral part of the United Republic of Tanzania. The two larger islands cover an area of 2,332 square kilometers. Zanzibar town is an international port and the capital of the larger island, Unguja and Chake Chake is the capital of Pemba.

Late in the 15th century, the Portuguese settled along the east coast of Africa. Since establishing the trade route to the Orient was their objective, there was no evangelization although there did exist some Christian activity. However, even this little Christianity died out when the Arab slave trade took over. It was only in the last half of the 19th century that Christianity returned to the islands with the coming of Spiritan missionaries from Europe. Ransomed slaves became the first Christians of today. They moved inland along with the missionaries, all of whom in the early days passed through the mission in Bagamoyo, the Mother Church of East Africa. Zanzibar remained largely unaf-

fectured by Christianity, although there were some forms of dialogue with the Arab sultanate and relations were generally good.

The existing population is approximately one million people of varying ethnic backgrounds: African Bantu, Arabs, Indians and others. The great majority, 99%, belongs to the Islamic faith introduced by the Arab slave traders. About 8,000-9,000 are Christians. Being such a minority, the Church has been the object of intolerance and the faithful frequently harassed and discriminated against when seeking jobs. Permission for leasing land and for building has often stagnated. However, this attitude is slowly changing due to the policy of the Church, which opens its facilities and services to all.

Culturally, the life of the islands is characterized by the Arabic civilization, strongly influenced by Islam. Women, especially, are affected by Islamic law. It is expected that women remain in the home. Subject to the authority of their husbands, few are able to realize their given potential as persons. Because divorce is so easy, many women are victims of temporary marriages, which are common at the time of the Ramadan fast. Often divorce takes place after only a few months but the woman is already pregnant and must bring up her child without any help from the father even though the law requires his assistance. Many of these women have already been married previously and have older children to care for as well, but they lack the education that would enable them to make a living for themselves and their children.

Zanzibar attained its Independence in 1964 and followed a system of socialism. All means of social services were nationalized and soon deteriorated. As a result of the introduction of a multi-party system of government in 1995, ethnic divisions emerged and situations of frequent disagreement arose.

Emphasis is being placed on tourism as a source of badly-needed hard currency. The islands possess very little in the way of material resources and most items needed must be imported. The main crop, cloves, has suffered from the collapse of the world market. There are no industries. Although fishing could be a good source of income, it has not been developed. Due to the nationalization of the land, most

indigenous Zanzibaris have some land, but in general, their farming is for subsistence only. The non-Muslims are migrants who came from the mainland to be casual laborers on the clove estates, owned by Arabs who live elsewhere. They have no property and live from hand to mouth. Living in rural areas, they survive by searching for food in season. Staple foods include cassava, bananas, beans, and maize. For many families there is only one meal a day.

The Diocese of Zanzibar

Present day Catholics trace their faith to the coming of the Spiritans from Alsace Lorraine in 1862. In 1868, those missionaries moved to a piece of property on the mainland given them by the Sultan. Some vestiges of the original mission on Pemba are still visible. Some 800 Catholics live on that island. The two parishes of Wete and Chake Chake have a pastoral team of four priests and five religious Sisters. Their ministry is mostly that of presence and witness of faith. Dialogue is mainly carried out by taking part in solving the social problems that affect the majority Muslim community and the minority non-Muslim.

Defining our apostolate

How do we define our apostolate in this predominantly (99%) Muslim country? The words of Cardinal Martini, writing in "To live the values of the Gospel" sum up our situation very well: *"Evangelization can take place either explicitly or implicitly through the witness of a life seriously transformed by the gospel. Evangelization does not mean to obtain immediate results of conversion and a change of heart. Evangelization means, above all, to promulgate the Good News with actions and words, and to present the proclamation as much as is possible to whoever has the will to receive the Good News in its most genuine and authentic form and, therefore, to deepen it and, if a person so decides, to receive it and live it"*.

The center of our apostolate is to elevate the low level state of life of the Zanzibaris to a higher level, which will give hope and relieve poverty. It was the Diocesan Pastoral Plan to provide the needed opportunities for the human person to realize his/her potential in the

fullness of life. With this in mind, a plan was drawn up in 1997 by the new Bishop. After six months of study, meetings with Church personnel and other members of the community, the major problem was identified as the lack of education; most of the people did not know how to read or write. The gospel that was preached to the people could not be interpreted in their own situation, just like a seed "sown on a rock". By focusing on education, we have opened up a dialogue with all the people, whether Christian or not. Parents of the children started asking questions and identified common concerns, which led to the development of the Maternal Health Care (MHC) as well as programs for women and young people.

We have come to realize that our apostolate is that of being present among Christians and non-Christians, by participating in solving the inherent problems that flow from lack of education. We are putting this into practice through programs in education, health care, women's development and attention to the youth. The vision of education as a means of dialogue and evangelization calls for a good knowledge of our own faith and the faith of our Muslim brothers and sisters. We are therefore training our pastoral personnel in both Christian catechesis and Islamic theology. We are convinced that true dialogue will come when we are sensitive to each other's beliefs and show an authentic mutual respect.

Education

Our immediate goal is to provide good education at every level and in every aspect of life. Because of the lack of schools, masses of children have not had the opportunity to go to school. The quality of education was so poor that students from the Islands were generally unable to pass exams for admission to good secondary schools on the mainland. The Church has already begun a number of kindergartens with the aim of opening up people's minds to the value of education. Muslim and Christian children study, play, and eat together, learning that externals do not create differences between us. Their experience is then shared with their other playmates and families. Many of these children are now attending the Diocesan Primary School on Unguja Island where

parents begged the Church to provide a school for their children as they leave kindergarten. There is also a need to help young people who have already gone through government schools and can go no further. The most promising amongst them are given a year of tutoring in English and Mathematics after which they take exams for good schools on the mainland. The success of this endeavor has resulted in our first indigenous vocations now in a minor seminary on the mainland and hundreds of other students studying in other schools. We are held back only by the limitations of the extreme poverty of the people; most students are only able to carry their education further if they can find a scholarship.

The experience of years of students living, studying and sharing together has brought greater understanding between the members of the two major religions. Moreover, the needs of the students have brought Christian and Muslim parents together to try to solve the problems. There has also been a noticeable impact at the national level, because our education system has enabled a good number of young people to meet with others from Kenya and the Tanzanian mainland. In other words, it has made those living on the islands more open to their neighbours.

Health Care

Lack of education has also created avoidable problems in the area of health care. There are a lot of preventable diseases that can be treated, but because people do not know how to set about dealing with such things, it remains a problem for the community. We now have three dispensaries in operation and two more are being built. The larger of the original dispensaries is being built up into a health center, which will provide treatment which was previously only available at considerable cost in distant hospitals. MHC Clinics are reaching out into the villages; special programs, such as teaching safe delivery to midwives, are part of the extended service given to the people in the area.

Any good human service is the extension of Christ's loving hand. A pregnant Muslim woman who was having severe pains following expensive ultrasound treatment, was informed by a health care worker

that her baby had died in her womb. To have the necessary operation, she would have to raise money, purchase supplies and then go back to the clinic. She left the clinic crying, not knowing what to do as her husband was out of town and she could not raise the money. Christian women heard her story and they advised her to visit our MCH clinic. She was welcomed by the sister in-charge and given proper medical care at less expense, including an ultrasound examination, which proved that her baby was still alive. She continued going to the clinic until the birth of a healthy baby. To prove them wrong, she brought her baby to the government health personnel who had initially told her that the baby had died in the womb. This and many other examples have made the center famous among non-Christians, leading them to question how this is possible with those they call "Infidels". For me, it is the beginning of real dialogue when such questions are raised.

Women in Development

Women are important agents of education since they have a special way of bringing the message to other women. Women on the African continent have a general role that places them in the heart of the family. They are the ones who form the children and do everything that is possible for the family. Muslim women in the islands have the same role but other roles are more established and enforced by their religion. African women in general do not get to develop their inborn talents, and are very limited as regards personal freedom. They are passive recipients rather than active agents of their own growth. Our program for both Christians and Muslims begins by helping them discover what it means to be a person who has dignity and deserves respect, is the subject of rights as well as responsibilities, and has a duty to develop her natural gifts for the benefit of herself, her family, neighbors and society. The content of the seminars and follow-up supervision includes home-making skills, childcare, family life, rearing and writing, and business practices for initiating small self-help projects.

The public media has commented on how much the Catholic Church is doing for women. At a Pan-African meeting held in Zanzibar, the President spoke of the importance of the development of women as

agents of peace. We thus put women at the center of our apostolate; we call upon them to take responsibility and use their gifts.

Youth Program

In general, we have lost the “adults” of our society and our hope is in the children and the youth. Young people are in need of something that will help them make up for what has been neglected in their early years. Through workshops, seminars and sports activities, the previously idle young men and women in the community are given an opportunity towards employment and self-improvement.

A group of boys were assisted with funds to begin building boats. Others have been trained in carpentry skills. Young women who volunteer to teach in the kindergartens are given the opportunity to attend seminars on the Montessori method during the year and a chance to teach upon completion of a three-year program. There are plans to build a small Montessori college together with training in Hotel Management. These activities bring young people of both religions together and thus minimize the issue of religious prejudice. We have even learned that sports like football are instruments of dialogue and sharing. Relations between the few Christians and majority Muslims have greatly improved through these social activities that we are called to share.

Hope through dialogue

There is hope for Zanzibar, through dialogue focusing on these socio-economic issues of society rather than religion. Building good relationships with all the branches of the government and inter-religious communities is a good start. Another example of “dialogue in action” is participating in community meetings and seminars, informing and educating parishioners through homilies and seminars, meeting the local Muslim leaders and sharing common matters of concern.

However, although we are in the minority, we still have to make our presence felt. An example of this happened recently during independence day celebrations. There was an incident, which left me feeling

humiliated, and I wrote a strong letter requesting an apology from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Zanzibar, as this was a blatant disregard of my position. I received the appropriate apology as a religious leader, and at the same time the people responsible were told and educated regarding my position in line with that of their Muslim leaders. We have rights as a minority; even though we respect the ways of the majority.

This is the new era, the New Evangelization. Through dialogue which stems from our programs for education, health, women and young people, we are also able, in a non-threatening way, to give people the opportunity to learn about Gospel values and the Christian way of life and the effect these have on individuals, families and society.

THE PHILIPPINES: A LEGACY OF DISTRUST

Daniel Somani

Daniel's credentials for working to build bridges in a region of Christian-Muslim distrust could hardly be better. Ordained in 1986 for the Province of USA West, he spent several years working in Algeria before joining the new team of Spiritans sent to the Philippines in 1998. Two contrasting situations have given him a wide experience of the problems and possibilities of building fraternal relationships with Muslims.

The coming of Islam

The history of the pre-colonial era of the Philippines is intertwined with trade and the introduction of Islam. Long before Spanish conquerors arrived, trade from other parts of Asia flourished. Then in the 9th century, a trade route evolved that linked Arabia with Central Asia. By the end of the 13th century, Arab, Indian, and Malay traders established settlements on the islands and Islam was introduced. Sultanates were subsequently established and made the Muslim communities the most developed areas in the archipelago. Islamisation resulted in the consolidation and centralization of political authority in the Sultans as the symbolic embodiment of Islam. They were sovereign in their territorial domains and this authorized them to forge alliances and treaties with foreign powers, including the British, Dutch, Spanish, and Americans.

Spanish Rule

As early as 1521, Spain reached the Philippines in search of the Spice Islands, but it was not until 1565 they gained control in the central region and then proceeded north. They conquered many vast Muslim regions; Manila itself was ruled by Muslims. Once Spain took over the

north, they set their sights on Mindanao and other southern islands.

For the first two and a half centuries of Spanish rule, Muslims were able to retain control in many parts: Mindanao was never fully colonized and the sultanates held on. Meanwhile, the rest of the Philippines was in the process of being "Christianized" and the new "Christians" marched on the "Moros" to "defend Christianity" and a whole new way of life recently imposed on them.

American involvement

It was not until the 1890s that a viable revolutionary movement arose. American support was enlisted by the rebels, and the Battle of Manila Bay on 1 May 1898 ushered in the American colonial period. When it became clear the Americans were, in fact, taking over the country, the American-Filipino War raged for three years. The U.S. government even signed a treaty with Sultan Janalul Kiram II, and by recognizing the Sultanate's sovereignty, the U.S. expected the sultanate and the Sultan to stop the revolt.

Eventually, when the revolt was crushed, the treaty was ignored and the Americans set out to integrate Muslim territories into the Filipino colony of the U.S., introducing direct rule from Manila, imposing their social system, and importing Christian peasants from the north to settle the vast region. In the 1930s, Christian governors were imposed on the Muslim regions. Sultanates were stripped of their powers and were no longer on the political scene. Subsequent governments encouraged Christian settlers from the north to go to Mindanao. In 1913 there were 324,816 Muslims in the province and only 85,148 Christians. Five years later, in 1918, as a result of migration, Christians increased 87%! But Christians were still only 22% of the population; 50% were Muslim and 28% Lumad (tribal people). By 1939, Christians were 53%, and at independence in 1946, Christians were 62% of the population of Mindanao, while the Muslims were only 29%. Landless Christians continued to pour into the south, aided by government sponsored land-grants, new schools, roads and development projects. Meanwhile, the Muslim areas remained mostly unaided and underdeveloped, often

as a sort of subtle punishment for their continuing resistance to accepting a “foreign” form of government and society.

Post-independence

There were many armed clashes and savage reprisals. Antagonism continued to divide the two communities. Some Muslims talked about an independent state where their culture, traditions and history would be respected. The Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) organized itself, and then armed Christian vigilante groups responded. This was a pretext for then-President Marcos to declare martial law. Massacres on both sides continued. In March 1984, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) was established. Its name highlights the group’s Islamic orientation with Islam as its official ideology.

In March 2000, after an armed clash in the town of Kauswagan (quite near to where the Spiritans are) in which Muslim separatists took over the town hall and declared the town part of an independent Muslim region, the then-President Estrada put forth his “all out war” policy. The army pounded suspected rebel areas mercilessly. On March 19, Abu Sayyaf rebels seized 70 students, teachers and a Catholic priest. Three, including the priest, were beheaded. On April 23, 21 tourists were kidnapped. Recently an Irish Columban priest was killed during a kidnapping attempt in a Muslim area, and an Italian Sacred Heart Father was kidnapped.

An inheritance of fear and prejudice

It is difficult to break old prejudices. The two communities basically live parallel lives, only mixing occasionally at the work place or in school. Young people here will tell you that although they have very good relationships with classmates of a different religion, it is still unthinkable for a Christian to invite a Muslim home for dinner, or vice versa. Once they leave school or work, both Christians and Muslims return to their religious ghettos. It is hard to eradicate the great fear, suspicion, and distain that each community has for the other.

Spiritans peace efforts

Still, many are trying to do something, including we Spiritans. Our parish in Digkila-an is surrounded by small Muslim communities with which we enjoy friendly relations. We have the chaplaincy at the University Student Center and Mercy Hospital, both of which are frequented by Muslims. And I am a member of the Ranao Muslim-Christian Movement for Dialogue and Peace, a group of Muslim and Christian leaders which meets once a month to share and see what can be done to bridge the gap between the communities and educate for peace and reconciliation. Unfortunately, the fairly new presence of American forces here in the south has served only to antagonize the Muslim community and polarize the Filipinos. Remember that all the military exercises are being held in the Muslim regions.

Centuries of fear, anger and distrust are difficult to tackle. For Muslims, this is a Muslim country that was invaded and continues to be invaded by Christians. For Christian Filipinos, who boast that the Philippines is the only Christian Country in Asia, this is their home and the Muslims are a disloyal minority making trouble. There are no easy answers. We Spiritans try in our own small way to build bridges, one relationship at a time.

ISLAM IN EUROPE

Anthony O'Malley

A specialist on Islam and Muslim-Christian relations and Christianity in the Middle East, Anthony O'Malley is director of research at the Centre for Christianity and Inter-religious Dialogue at Heythrop College, University of London. Below, we give a shortened version of his paper given to the General Chapter of the Dominicans in 1995. The full article, with copious notes, can be found on the SEDOS web site¹.

Islam presents two distinct faces to Europe, the one a threat, the other that of an itinerant culture. However viewed, the history of the relationship between Islam and Europe is problematic and is likely to remain so for the foreseeable future.

The relationship between Christians and Muslims over the centuries has been long and tortuous. Geographically the origins of the two communities are not so far apart — Bethlehem and Jerusalem are only some eight hundred miles from Mecca. But as the two communities have grown and become universal rather than local, the relationship between them has changed — sometimes downright enmity, sometimes rivalry and competition, sometimes co-operation and collaboration. Different regions of the world in different centuries have therefore witnessed a whole range of encounters between Christians and Muslims. The historical study of the relationship is still in its beginnings. It cannot be otherwise, since Islamic history, as well as the history of those Christian communities that have been in contact with Islam, is still being written.

Obviously, Christian-Muslim relations do not exist in a vacuum. The two worlds have known violent confrontation. Muslim conquests of Christian parts of the world; the Crusades still vividly remembered today, the expansion of the Turkish Ottoman empire; the Armenian massacres and genocide; European colonialism of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the rise of Christian missions; the continuing difficult situations in which Christians find themselves in dominant

Muslim societies, such as Sudan, Indonesia, Pakistan. It would be petty to try to figure out who is more guilty in these conflicts. The weight of this history may be why few approach Islam without strong feelings one way or the other.

Islam in European history

The presence of Muslims in continental Europe probably goes back to the earliest days of historical Islam. Four periods can be distinguished. The first of these has passed into history — the period of Islamic Spain and Muslim rule in Sicily and southern Italy. The Normans put an end to the latter in the eleventh century, and the Spanish *reconquista* erased the last Muslim foothold in Spain in 1492. All that remains today is the rich contribution Islam made to many aspects of European culture.

The second phase was the result of the spread of Mongol armies during the thirteenth century. After only a few generations, their successor states became Muslim, and one of these, the Khanate of the Golden Horde, centred on the Volga river basin north of the Caspian and Black Seas, left a permanent Muslim population of various Tartar groups stretching from the Volga down to the Caucasus and Crimea. As itinerant traders and soldiers, many of these groups later travelled around the Russian Empire and established colonies in Finland and the area which today straddles the border between Poland and the Ukraine.

The third phase is marked by Ottoman expansion into the Balkans and central Europe. This was the context for the settlement of Turkish populations, which still survive today in parts of Bulgaria, the former State of Yugoslavia, Romania and Greece. Albania became a country with a Muslim majority, and Slav groups in Bosnia and parts of Bulgaria also became Muslim.

Islam in contemporary Western Europe

The fourth phase is relatively new, namely the establishment of Muslim communities in Western Europe. The last half of the twentieth century saw the arrival in Europe of an increasing number of Muslim immigrants. The majority came seeking work, while others sought

political asylum. The growth of Muslim minority populations in the West since the early 1970's generated increasing concern about their presence and settlement in areas that have for centuries been considered the heart of Christendom. Their presence has, in some quarters, provoked fear and suspicion while in others it has proved a stimulus for intercultural and inter-religious exchange.

It is estimated that there are currently twenty to twenty five million Muslims in the whole of Europe including Russia and the Balkans, and some ten to twelve million in Western Europe.² They are partly a by-product of earlier relations established between expanding European Empires of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the Muslim world. The vanguard of these Muslim settlers in Europe were soldiers who fought under the banner of European nations: North Africans and Senegalese for France; Tartars and Bosnians for Germany; Indonesians and Surinamese for the Netherlands; South Asians and Africans for Britain.

A breakdown of the countries of provenance of Muslims in Europe shows that they form an extremely heterogeneous group. While those in Eastern European countries are descendants of Tartar and Turkish military and civilian administrators and Slavic converts to Islam, the Muslims of Western Europe come from the waves of migrants in the recent past. They exhibit great linguistic, ethnic and cultural diversity. It cannot be over stressed that beyond their profession of Islam, the various groups often have little in common. Frequently, the only common language among them is that of the European host country. Even those who come from the same country of origin stem from diverse and often antagonistic ethnic groups, such as Berbers and Arabs from the Maghreb or Turks and Kurds from Turkey. Their civil status varies greatly from country to country.

Their ways of understanding and identifying with Islam also show a rich diversity. Many, possibly the majority, of those coming from Turkey and the Maghreb come from village societies where Islam was part of popular religion. Islam offers them a global culture and a means of social structuring. They are thus strongly attached to the religion, although they may have but a vague knowledge of what it teaches. The

local Islamic leader, whose position carries great authority especially among the first generation migrants, may himself have only an elementary knowledge of classical Islam. Many of the social and cultural problems faced by Muslims in Europe are similar to those faced by other, non-Muslim, migrant groups, while others are unique to them. The culture shock of moving into the highly mobile culture of modern industrial Europe and the difficulties of social integration are considerable.

However, Muslim migrant groups face another complex issue connected with their Islamic faith. They are often both culturally and religiously alienated. Islam has determined the familial and social relationships, the rhythm and structure of daily life, the moral and value systems of their previous way of life. But in Europe they find themselves in a pluralist, secular environment in which there is little place for religious observance in the pattern of daily activities. Second and third generations of these immigrants continue to experience in their lives a real and deep tension, finding themselves more and more integrated into the society in which they live and yet still influenced by the religious and cultural values and ideals held so dear by parents and elders in their communities.

Muslim migrants tend, not surprisingly, to transport to Europe the Islamic patterns of observance which they followed in their countries of provenance. Maghribis reproduce in Paris and Frankfurt the Marabout brotherhoods which are characteristic of Morocco and Algeria. Their identification with Islam is strong, although many have never attended Qur'anic schools and the Berbers know little Arabic. The brotherhoods offer a strong sense of community and stress the traditional values of personal dignity, hospitality to the stranger and patient resignation.

Many adjust to a dichotomised existence and take refuge in traditional values of behaviour in the private spheres of home and ghetto neighbourhood. Others become alienated from all religious and ethical value systems. Evidence for this is found in the high percentage of Muslim prisoners in almost all Western European countries.

Unity and diversity

Muslims themselves are ambivalent about their situation. They debate whether it is Islamically acceptable to live in a non-Muslim environment, they worry about the influence of western culture and education on their children, they debate whether they should become citizens, or opt to be transients in perpetuity. Some argue for establishing Islamic ghettos in order to maintain their children in the faith, while others see the possibility of living in a pluralistic society where Islam is recognised as a religion of divine origin with a divine mission to the world.

In early 1989 the 'Rushdie affair' hit the public, with Muslim protests in Britain against the perceived insult of *The Satanic verses* and the subsequent Iranian *fatwa*. This was followed by another celebrated incident when a group of Muslim girls were excluded from a secondary school north of Paris for insisting on wearing headscarves. This aroused a heated public debate across Europe about the place of Muslims in European society, about the relationship between religion and state, as well as about perceptions of Islam and Christian-Muslim relations.

Many younger people have reacted by rediscovering Islam. International Islamic movements give them a sense of belonging to a larger, self assertive community. Paradoxically, their religious identity as Muslims, with the great demands it makes upon the individual, offer values which seem both absolute and unimpeachable. Observers in various countries have noted, for example, the increased practice of the *Ramadan* fast in recent years among Muslim youth. In this context of unity and diversity, three responses have evolved among Muslims in Europe: preservation, integration, mission.

Preservation. The first is the effort to reproduce the Islamic way of life of the country of origin: In order to protect itself from a society where Islamic traditions could easily crumble, there is an inclination towards exaggerated rigidity. The host society is considered decadent, dangerous, contact with it is undesirable and should be avoided as far as possible. Dress, behaviour, relations between the sexes and patterns of worship

should differentiate the Muslim from his or her European counterpart. The myth of the "return home", for instance, which was entertained by the first Muslim migrants after the Second World War, has raised two questions. Can Western Europe accept the existence of Muslim communities within them? Can Muslim communities cope with a minority situation?

Integration. A second response is that Muslims should develop a religious identity adapted to their cultural surroundings. They should work to build a 'European Islam', integrating what is good from the local cultures and making their own Islamic contribution to the future of European societies. This point of view, which often challenges traditional interpretations of Islamic doctrine, is based on the belief that Islam is a way of life which can be fully lived in any political and cultural context. This approach to Islamic life in Europe, however, presupposes a positive cultural experience of life in the various European countries in which Muslims live.

Mission. A third tendency should not be forgotten. It is that of the 'missionary' who wants to win Europe over to Islam. This desire is motivated by the conviction that Islam is the ultimate revelation of the original revelation, and hence the religion for all. The failure of the ideologies of the last century and the moral degeneracy of liberal capitalism means for some that Islam, and Islam alone, can offer salvation. There is no reason to be alarmist and to assume that all Muslims entertain this project, but it would be unwise to ignore it.

In Eastern Europe, more settled Muslim communities offer a further variation. In Yugoslavia, Muslims came to define themselves by way of opposition. They were not Serbs or Orthodox, they were not Croats or Catholic. They were simply Muslims, marked by a wider membership of the Islamic world. This was their difficulty at the demise of the Federation. The Croats had Croatia to fall back on, and the Serbs had Serbia, but the Muslims only had Bosnia, which had been dominated by the

Serbs since 1918. Yet the Muslims did not want to be forced into leaving for Turkey. Contrary to allegations of their identification with Turks, the Bosnian Muslims have always had a strong sense of their Slavic and European identity.

Views of the Varieties of Islam

The prism through which others view the nature of the unity and diversity of Islam as a global tradition continues to inform encounter and dialogue. In their views of Islam, both Muslims and non-Muslims seem on the whole to gravitate towards the notion that all Muslims are really the same, but they say so for very different reasons. For non-Muslims — especially some European and American secularists — images of a monolithic Islam often arise out of a fear of the unknown, or of organised religion, or of autonomous spiritual values, all of which encourage over-simplification in dealing with 'the other.' That fear is in turn exacerbated by long standing stereotypes of Muslims as bellicose and generally given to religiously motivated and sanctioned violence.

For their part, Muslims tend for several reasons to dismiss the notion that there are varieties of Islam. One is that their tradition's characterisation of Christian disunity poses an unacceptable image of a religious community. Another is that their own understanding of, and wish for, a truly global community of Muslims leaves no room whatsoever for any significant diversity within it. If non-Muslims' consistent attribution of a seamless unity to Islam rests on an unjustifiably negative reading of Muslims as humanly homogeneous, that of Muslims is built on an equally uncritical idealisation of Islam as religiously uniform. The first characterisation is unfair, the second unrealistic.

Vatican II on Islam and Christian-Muslim relations

When, during the second session, the text about Judaism was presented, the Catholic Oriental patriarchs and bishops living in Muslim countries asked for 'balance' — in other words, that justice should be done not only to the reality of Judaism but also to Islam. This demand issued in two relatively short but important and decisive texts. Although they are primarily concerned with the Catholics' practical

attitude towards Muslims, they imply elements of a fresh Catholic theological view of Islam. Paragraph 16 of "Lumen Gentium", the Constitution on the Church, declares:

"The plan of salvation also embraces those who acknowledge the Creator, and among these the Muslims are first: they profess to hold the faith of Abraham and along with us they worship the one merciful God who will judge humanity on the last day".

The study of the proceedings of the Council makes it clear that it did not want to state an objective link between Islam, Ishmael and the biblical revelation. The reference to Abraham is put on the subjective level: 'they profess...' Islam is situated first among the non-biblical, monotheistic religions and it is boldly affirmed that the Muslims adore the same God as the Christians.

The second text of the Council is longer and more substantial. It constitutes paragraph 3 of "Nostra aetate", the declaration on non-Christian religions. Paragraph 2 states the principles of the Christian vision of religions in general — to accept all that they contain of the true and good as coming from God. Without however falling into syncretism, the Council goes on to say:

"The Church also looks upon Muslims with respect. They worship the one God living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to humanity and to whose decrees, even the hidden ones, they seek to submit themselves whole-heartedly, just as Abraham, to whom the Islamic faith readily relates itself, submitted to God. They venerate Jesus as a prophet, even though they do not acknowledge him as God, and they honour his virgin mother Mary and even sometimes devoutly call upon her. Furthermore they await the day of judgement when God will require all people brought back to life. Hence they have regard for the moral life and worship God especially in prayer, almsgiving and fasting. Although considerable dissension and enmities

between Christians and Muslims may have arisen in the course of the centuries, this synod urges all parties that, forgetting past things, they train themselves towards sincere mutual understanding and together maintain and promote social justice and moral values as well as peace and freedom for all people”.

Two characteristics of this text are immediately evident. First, it highlights the common or related points between Islam and Christianity, noting at the same time the essential difference: the Christian profession of the divinity of Jesus. Second, it opens up the possibility of collaboration between the two religions, at the service of the most pressing needs of contemporary humanity.

The opening sentence of the paragraph, apparently a trite formula, in fact constitutes a unique statement and an absolutely new beginning in so far as it is an official declaration about Islam issued by the highest teaching authority of the Catholic Church. Faith in, and adoration of, God as One are the centre and heart of Islam. It has been pointed out by the Jesuit Islamicist, Christian Troll, that this is close to the first article of the Christian faith — 'Credo in *unum Deum*' — even if, for Christians, the divine oneness opens itself to the Trinity of the persons. Muslims and Christians adore together the one God, even if they do not always give God the same 'names' nor give the same meaning to apparently similar 'names'.

A Continuing Challenge

The relationship between Europe and Islam as it enters a New Era will continue to present challenges. In the first encyclical of his pontificate, "Redemptor hominis", Pope John Paul II referred to the religious map of the world and underlined the importance for the Church of taking account of religious plurality. Having given more attention to the relations between Christians and Muslims than any of his predecessors, his overriding attitude is one of respect for the valid religious experience of Muslims. His is a vision for today's Europe — a vision with

which Christians can approach Muslims, not merely eager to speak and give, but also ready to learn.

*Dialogue is not a surrender of our own beliefs,
but a necessary mode of existence in a world of difference.*

¹ www.sedos.org/

² Estimates of Muslim population in European countries: Austria - 100,000; Belgium - 250,000; Denmark - 60,000; France - 3,000,000; Germany - 2,500,000; Ireland - 5,000; Italy - 500,000; Luxembourg - 1,000; Netherlands - 400,000; Norway - 25,000; Portugal - 15,000; Spain 450,000; Sweden - 100,000; Switzerland - 100,000; United Kingdom - 2,000,000.

"We cannot truly call on God, the Father of all, if we refuse to treat in a brotherly way any person, created as they are in the image of God. One's relations to God the Father and to other human beings are so linked together that Scripture says: 'He who does not love does not know God' (1 John 4:8). No foundation therefore remains for any theory or practice that leads to discrimination between individuals or nations so far as their human dignity and the rights flowing from it are concerned. The Church reproves, as foreign to the mind of Christ, any discrimination or harassment of people because of their race, colour, condition of life, or religion. On the contrary, following in the footsteps of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, this sacred synod ardently implores the Christian faithful to 'maintain good fellowship among the nations' (1 Peter 2:12), and, if possible, to live for their part in peace with all people, so that they may truly be sons and daughters of the Father who is in heaven" (Vatican II: 'Nostra Aetate', no. 15).

GHANA: MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN INITIATIVES IN THE NORTH

John Osei-Yaw

Before his ordination in 1999 for the West African Province, John did a two year "stage" in Senegal. His first appointment was to the Diocese of Bolgatanga in Northern Ghana. In September 2002, he was appointed as Director of the Spiritan Postulancy in Kumasi, Ghana.

Religion in Ghana

Traditionally, Ghana was a pluralistic society in terms of ethnicity and religion and in fact, the two went together. Each ethnic group, big or small, had its own religion and its own way of worship. In recent times, the situation has changed with the arrival of foreign religions such as Islam and Christianity which have largely taken over the traditional way of worship. The census of the year 2000 was published this year: it shows that 15.5% are Moslems, 68% Catholics and 15.6% adhere to Traditional Religions.

The Catholic Church is divided into four ecclesiastical provinces, three of them in the south and one in the north. The Northern Province is made up of the diocese of Tamale, Wa, Damango, Yendi and Navrongo-Bolgatanga.. These dioceses cover the three northern regions and it is here that the bulk of the Muslim population is situated. For instance, according to the Archbishop's report, out of an estimated 2,000,000 inhabitants in the Archdiocese of Tamale, about 60% are Muslims, 38% Traditional Religion and 2% Christians. It was therefore important to start dialoguing with these religions early for effective evangelization. I will therefore present in this report what has taken place in the province up to this time.

The history of Islam in Ghana

Islam first arrived in this area as far back as the 16th century through the extensive trading from North Africa to the South. Muslims from The

Sudan, Algeria and Mali came to Ghana through Burkina Faso the then Upper Volta and settled in Northern Ghana. The Northern Kingdom favoured these people and promoted Islam as it answered their socio-economic needs. Islam since then has become an integral part of the life of the people of this area, to the extent of making it difficult even today for the people to accept any other religion. The colonial authorities also protected Islam in this part of the country by preventing any effective evangelization of the people by other religions. But despite the fact that Islam came very early into Ghana, it survived in the north since the Asante people made it difficult for them to penetrate into the rest of the country.

Dialogue in Tamale diocese

The history of Christian/Muslim dialogue in Northern Ghana goes back some 50 years ago when the Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers) arrived in the Archdiocese of Tamale. A lot of efforts were made to dialogue with the Muslims who had already settled in the area and were the majority. At that time, there was no particular person or group in charge of it.

In 1977, a sister of the Congregation of Our Lady of Africa, who had been trained in Islam and knew Arabic, came to work in the Archdiocese and she was asked to take charge. Unfortunately she died in a road accident after a year in office. Her death brought the idea to a standstill until 10 years later when another sister of the same Congregation, Sr. Marie-Renee, came to take over. Sr. Renee started the work by visiting Muslim houses and Mosques in order to have personal contact with them.

In 1991, a Muslim-Christian reflection group was set up. This group met regularly, every three months. At each meeting, a group would present something relevant for discussion. Topics treated among others were: Tolerance in Christianity and in Islam, Marriage in Christianity and in Islam, Jihad, Liberation Theology and the relation between religions and social life. Archbishop Kpiebaya officially inaugurated this group in October 1995. Present at the inauguration was the Northern Regional Minister, who was a Muslim, and some Muslim leaders.

GHANA: MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN INITIATIVES IN THE NORTH

The group was officially given the name "Inter-religious dialogue Committee". The membership of the group was about 40, half Muslims (Sunnis and Ahmadis) and half Christians (a majority Catholic but with representatives from other Christian denominations). It had a 7-member executive committee: 3 Muslims, 3 Christians and the coordinator, Sr. Renee. The Chairperson was, and still is, a Muslim.

The stated aims of the committee were to focus on formation and education, in order to:

- promote peace, understanding, mutual respect and appreciation among people of different beliefs, especially Muslims and Christians;
- encourage co-operation and collaboration between Christians and Muslims in dealing with common problems affecting the people, such as poverty, illiteracy, disease, etc., to ensure development of the area;
- enhance religious freedom and joint efforts to promote and protect the religious values of both Muslim and Christians.

What has been achieved so far? Certainly a deeper mutual understanding and the building up of a cordial relationship between Christians and Muslim in the north of the country. The group also played a very effective mediation role in 1994 and 1996 when there were ethnic conflicts in the Region and peace was brought about in some areas. At present, a series of dialogues are going on to see if both Christians and Muslims can have a development project for women in the Tamale municipality.

Progress in other dioceses

About three years ago, the bishops of the northern ecclesiastical province thought that the work was becoming too much for one group to cover all the five dioceses in the province. It was therefore agreed that each diocese in the province should have its own team. A five-member committee, including three lay people and two priests, was inaugurated in Bolgatanga and was charged to promote dialogue between Christians and Muslims. Since then, a number of activities, such

as funerals and marriages, have brought Christians and Muslims together. For example, Christians attend Muslim functions like 'Id al-Fitr, while Muslims were present at the opening and closing of our Synod two years ago. Christians and Muslims have also agreed to have an annual peace march in Bolgatanga town; this year, it took place in April.

But many challenges still remain:

- How to get all the priests to accept and get involved in inter-religious dialogue;
- How to change the outlook of many Catholics, who feel we should have nothing to do with Moslems because they do not believe in Jesus;
- How to convince some of the other Christian denominations to be more prudent in their utterances - which can do great harm to relationships between religions;
- How to overcome the effects of some traditional practices of both Christians and Muslims (e.g. Muslims do not allow their women to marry Christians and vice versa) which make dialogue difficult.

NORTH CAMEROON: THE CHANGING FACE OF ISLAM

Juan-Maria Ayanz and Basil Agba

Traditionally, Spiritan missions in most of West Africa were located along the southern coast, and so contact with the world of Islam was somewhat limited. But in more recent times - in Sierra Leone, Ghana, Benin, Nigeria and Cameroon - the Congregation has been offering its services to some of the more northerly dioceses, thus considerably increasing the number of confreres having daily contact with Muslims. Two such confreres have contributed this short reflection. Basil Agba, ordained in 1989, is from the Province of Nigeria. Juan Ayanz is from Spain; he recently returned to his work in North Cameroon after two years of in-depth Islamic studies in Cairo and Rome.

For a better understanding of the development of the Muslim community and the underlying currents that have influenced it, we will begin with a brief overview of the history of the Islamisation of the north of Cameroon.

The early history of Islam

In the Sahel area of Africa where we live, Islam is a part of the cultural heritage of some of the peoples - a heritage which is over a thousand years old. The first arrival of Islam dates back to the time of the Ibadite Berbers, the first people to establish trading networks across the Sahara. Subsequently, Islam here became exclusively Sunni-Malikite with the success of the Almoravid movement in the 11th century. The aim of this movement was to re-create the purity of primitive Islam in the western desert and in so doing, they introduced their own juridical strictness into the local brand of Islam. In this movement, the traders of the Maghreb played a dominant role; they rapidly became (as in the Ghanaian Empire) the councillors, secretaries and chargés d'affaires of

the local sultans. But despite their influence, Islam was restricted to the princes and the urban elite, without penetrating the rural peoples, who remained often indifferent and sometimes curious and even hostile towards Islam.

It was only later that Islam found its roots and strength in this area. It happened in the 14th century with Mansa Musa and Suliman in Mali. By the 16th century, there had emerged many African Muslim intellectuals (e.g. at Tombouctou). The 17th century saw the Nasir-al-Din movement, an attempt to regulate political and social life according to the teachings of shari'a with a view to establishing a Muslim theocracy. The model for this movement was the "holy war" led by Uthman Dan Fodio (1754-1817); he had a great influence on the history and the Islamisation of our region, setting up its structures of organisation (the Lamidas) and inaugurating a reform of Islam.

Another important moment was the spreading of brotherhoods - above all, the Qadiriyya, the Tidjaniyya and the Mahdiyya - which had a great influence (as is still the case) on the in-depth islamisation of the people. It was through them that the spiritual practices of the Sufi Muslims were made available to all.

After independence

In colonial times, despite the resistance of the Muslim community to the colonial enterprise (above all the Mahdiyya), the authorities in fact often favoured Islam, using its structures for indirect government and even creating their own Fulani Lamidas. After independence, the government of President Ahidjo (1960-1982), while keeping a tight control on the different religious currents, aimed at islamising and thus unifying the "pagan" peoples of the north as a balance to the Christian south! But when President Paul Biya came to power, the northern administration, which until then had been almost exclusively in Muslim hands, became increasingly laicised. The Muslims felt they were losing their power.

A new Islamic renaissance in the country

For the last few years, we are witnessing a strong Islamic comeback and a new period of reform, which is also a sort of compensation for the previous loss of influence in the political sphere. This movement of "Islamic reform" (which is being seen in many parts of the world) is spreading under the influence of the Wahhabite and Da'wa (call to Islam) currents which control the Muslim World League, which in turn is pushing and financing the diffusion of Islam throughout. Here in Cameroon, it is funding the Islamic Cultural Association of Cameroon (A.C.I.C.). It is also paying for the building of mosques and Islamic institutes which are pushing instruction in Arabic and Islam along Wahhabite lines. They give scholarships for students to study at universities in Medina, Cairo, Sudan and Niger. They organise pilgrimages to Mecca which are becoming more and more popular; they subsidise the importation of a large amount of Islamic literature; they control the media (Islamic newspapers, radio and television broadcasts).

The future?

These reformist Islamic movements (Wahhabites and Da'wa) are presently replacing the older strands (traditional Islam, brotherhoods etc) and are taking over the direction and the representation of the Muslim community in this area. What will be the result? If we are not mistaken, the redrawing of past models, the evident Islamic influence from Nigeria and the influence of Wahhabite and Da'wa could easily lead to Islamism. How can we continue to build bridges with the various Islamic movements? How can we prevent the frequent confrontations in northern Nigeria spreading to the Cameroon?

It is essential that bridges continue to be built in everyday life, in sharing in development projects and in tackling common problems. Already, Muslim parents play a full part in the committees of our schools; they are on our committees for human development; they come to our schools, health centres and libraries. We must also make efforts to join their associations.

It looks as though we may be seeing an expansion of Wahhabism which is increasingly separating itself from radical forms of Islam which it previously financed. The reaction to the events of September 11th would seem to support this. Are we seeing a worldwide tailing off of the islamist movement? Look at Iran, Afghanistan, Sudan, Pakistan. And should we see September 11th as a sign of its strength or of its demise?

"If the Sharia has become a matter of great controversy, it is mainly because of its political dimensions. The Muslim is the first to acknowledge that there is a political angle to the Sharia and when we are in politics, it is necessary that things must be discussed. Political ideology and ideas cannot be imposed. Whoever controls laws, especially laws that can be enforced by the instruments of government, is in politics. It has to do with power and we have seen how this power has been used, and sometimes misused, since the Sharia issue arose. If one person is in a position to make a rule that forces me to fold up my business, surely that person has power over me. If such decisions, taken in my regard, are contrary to my own interest, I have a right to fight against it. When I fight against it, it is not enough to tell me this is God's injunction. It is necessary that I must accept it as God's injunction. This is the crux of the whole matter..."

We expect that the poor Christians in the villages of the 'Sharia States' will not be left to fight alone a futile battle. Christians all over the country should be ready to come to their aid - not to shoot, burn or kill, but to insist on the respect of the religious rights of everybody" (Archbishop John Onayekan of Abuja to the SIST Symposium, March 2001).

MAURITIUS: A COMPLEX RELATIONSHIP

Jean-Luc Rencker

The island of Mauritius in the Indian Ocean was colonised in turn by the French and the British. Originally uninhabited, it was subsequently populated by peoples from a variety of different ethnic origins and religious traditions. In recent times, an important centre for inter-religious dialogue has been set up by the Spiritans at Pont-Praslin. Jean-Luc Rencker of the Province of France, ordained in 1983, is currently working in this centre and he represented Mauritius at the Spiritan meeting in Banjul.

The historical background

Because of its tragic history, the result of slavery and the subsequent importing of labour from abroad, Mauritius has an almost unique distinction amongst the nations today: in one small island, nearly all the great religions of the world are forced to live side by side. The approximate statistics would be as follows: Hindus 48.5%, Christians 28%, Muslims 17%, Buddhists from China 2%, and a very small number of agnostics and unbelievers. Each of these groups could be subdivided, often reflecting the divisions existing in their countries of origin. But as a general rule, religions would be distinguished along racial lines, with the exception of the Christians whose forebears came from Europe, Africa and, to a small extent, India and China.

The Catholic Church arrived with the "Whites" and the "Creoles" with French colonisation. With the abolition of slavery in 1835, the British colonial government (which had taken over the country in 1810) shipped in workers from outside, mainly from north India. They came with their own culture and traditions and did their best to keep them alive, even though they were largely ignored by the colonial authorities. At that time, only Christianity (mostly Catholic) was given financial help by the State, but after independence in 1968, all religions

(with the exception of a few sects) were subsidised according to the number of their adherents.

Two significant happenings

- One evening around 10 o'clock, under a full moon, I went in search of bread. It was the time when normally the first loaves would emerge from the wooden stoves in the bakeries. That evening, there was some delay so I sat down to wait in a corner. I was joined by the men who had been kneading the dough and the conversation soon got round to the subject that was dominating Muslim circles at the time: the "*Satanic Verses*" of Salman Rushdie which had recently been published. This "brick" thrown into the Islamic lake was making waves that were reaching into every corner of Muslim society in Mauritius. The Ayatollah Khomeyni had passed a fatwa against Rushdie, condemning him to death; some of those present in the bakery not only approved of the sentence but declared themselves ready to play a part in its execution! For more than an hour, they took turns in explaining to this astonished Christian the evils of the Christian West and how it was leading men astray. How could Christians be honest men when they make the man Jesus into a God? And even worse, they drink wine while claiming they are receiving the blood of Christ! After some time, one of the Muslims posed a thorny question: is it permissible to put somebody to death in the name of God? Is this not challenging God himself? The debate ended in an extraordinary cacophony because there was deep disagreement amongst them.
- A year ago, a session on Islam was held for Christians who were anxious to move their relationship with Islam beyond a more or less peaceful state of cohabitation. Young Muslims explained the basis of their faith and the Christians did likewise - their attachment to Christ, sent by the Father, who died and rose again to give us life. Here are some extracts from what was said by the young Muslims:

Having recited the "Bismillah", they quoted from the Koran, Sourate II, verse 177: "*Virtue does not consist in turning your face*

to the East or the West; a really good man is the person who -

- *believes in God, in the last day, in the angels, in the Book and in the prophets;*
- *for love of God gives his help or goods to his relations, to orphans, to beggars;*
- *who redeems captives, says his prayers, gives alms;*
- *carries out commitments;*
- *shows himself patient in adversity, in hard times, in times of violence etc.*

These well-known five pillars were the basic inspiration of the lives of these young people. For them, Islam answers all the questions to which a young person seeks an answer. One of them admitted to passing through a time of doubt after leaving school; he was studying science and he found it difficult to reconcile it with the religious texts. But gradually, he came to realise the depth of the revelation of God in the holy Koran. Here are some extracts from their testimonies:

- * *"Islam is a unity. It teaches everything, from how to wash to how to govern one's country. It is a balanced religion. It brings freedom. Everything is allowed apart from what is forbidden."*
- * *"Islam recommends hygiene. It insists on a minimum of cleanliness. It recommends baths and ablutions. A house has to be kept clean because it is a place of prayer. The environment must be protected."*
- * *Islam insists that one dresses as well as possible."*
- * *A Muslim has five meetings a day with God in prayer."*
- * *"One's surroundings are important in Islam. It is not practised between the four walls of a mosque. It is lived from rising to sleeping. A Muslim must also be concerned with the problems of his community."*
- * *Islam is not attached to any one country, region, race or people. Neither is it attached to a particular epoch or planet. The message transcends all the galaxies. It is a universal message."*
- * *Muhammad said: 'An Arab is not superior to another Arab nor to a non-Arab. The one who is superior is he who is closest to God. A*

Muslim is a Muslim in action. He cannot remain passive when his neighbour's stomach is empty."

- * *A Muslim must believe in Moses and Jesus. Jesus, Muhammad and Moses were sent by God"*

The two groups recognised that there were significant differences in their beliefs. But is the essence not the same for both religions: faithfulness to the love of God and one's brothers and sisters?

How can we move ahead?

The two incidents related above show clearly that dialogue with believing Muslims will not progress until we are ready to break down certain barriers. The strongest of these is undoubtedly our ingrained prejudices. In Mauritius, Christians regard their Muslim brothers as "fanatics", which seems to be borne out by the first example. If we do not advance beyond that point, we continue to build up our cultural and ethnic fortresses which, sooner or later, will lead to violent conflicts, as happened here in 1968 and 1999.

Dialogue does not consist of making a list of all our differences of belief. This is not to deny that there is a very real dogmatic "abyss" between the two religious traditions. But as long as we are prepared to pass the frontiers of debate and exchange of ideas, the gap can be bridged. Beyond the theological differences, there is a whole area of spiritual sharing that is open to us. We must, of course be realistic: this sort of dialogue could only be practised by a small number of believers. But our experience in Mauritius indicates that there are real possibilities in that direction.

In the immediate future, the most fruitful path to take is that of a combined combat against all the forms of exclusion that our modern society is creating. We should identify ourselves with those who are being crushed, to share their struggles and their hopes. This is the path that was followed in the wake of a series of meetings that took place at Pont-Praslin in our island. The group concerned consists of Muslims, Christians and Hindus - hence the name that they chose for themselves: "*The Mosaic*". Throughout the year, this group organises inter-

religious meetings to reflect on a particular theme; but above all, they work in conjunction with other groups who are trying to help the most neglected parts of our society. It is essentially a 'practical' dialogue.

But note that even this type of dialogue entails a social mixing with the other group, and this is where the shoe pinches. It is a fact that in Mauritius, there are not many people who are willing to take this apparently simple step of reaching out to those of other religions and ethnic backgrounds. There is a great deal of history and insularity behind their reticence.

And finally, it is evident that Muslims are no more drawn to inter-religious dialogue than are all the other groups. We have some interesting links with a group of conservative Muslims (the brain-child of a certain Tariq Ramadan, who visits us regularly). But it is obvious from our contacts with them that their aim is in no way inter-religious dialogue but rather to give a more attractive and modern face to contemporary Islam. This has become a priority for them since the religious confrontations in Mauritius in 1999 and the destruction of the Twin Towers in New York in 2001.

The road of dialogue is a difficult one and we are only just taking our first steps along it.

"There exist different forms of inter-religious dialogue:

a) The dialogue of life, where people strive to live in an open and neighbourly spirit, sharing their joys and sorrows, their human problems and preoccupations;

b) The dialogue of action, in which Christians and others collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people;

c) The dialogue of theological exchange, where specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages, and to appreciate each other's spiritual values;

d) The dialogue of religious experience, where persons, rooted in their own religious traditions, share their spiritual riches, for instance with regard to prayer and contemplation, faith and ways of searching for God or the Absolute"

(Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue: 'Proclamation and Dialogue' [1991], no. 42).

SPIRITANS: EXPERIENCES AND TESTIMONIES

Many other interesting experiences and insights were shared by Spiritans working in Islamic milieux when they came together at Banjul in June, 2002. Space does not allow us to include them all, but we print some extracts below to illustrate the variety of situations and relationships that our confreres are experiencing.

It was encouraging to hear that there are places where there is a tradition of co-operation and peaceful interaction between Christians and Muslims. Two such examples come from Sierra Leone and The Gambia:

From Francis Folleh (Sierra Leone):

"In many families in Sierra Leone, there are both Christian and Muslim members. It is interesting to know that some of our Catholic priests and religious come from Muslim families or have some Muslim connections. There is no misunderstanding or discrimination among the members of these families even though they all do not share the same faith; when a need arises, they are there to support each other. The issue of freedom of worship is so much encouraged and practised that there is no fear that one may be treated badly for choosing a different religion to that followed by one's parents.

...It is a common practice in our country for a Muslim man to marry a Christian wife or a Christian man to marry a Muslim wife. Both will live in peace, neither spouse trying to convert the other to any one particular faith. In certain cases, the Muslim man will join the wife in the Church to bless their marriage and the husband will accept the certificates that are offered in the Church to bind their marriage.

These cordial relationships are also seen at times of celebration of the major feasts, be they Christian or Muslim. During those days it is very difficult to tell who is Muslim and who is Christian because all will celebrate as if they were of the same faith. When we Christians, for instance, are celebrating Christmas, Easter, or the New Year, all the places of worship, dancing clubs and restaurants will be filled with people celebrating the same event. The mutual co-operation in our worship shows the type of relationship that exists between Christians and Muslims in Sierra Leone, especially when we share gifts with those who do not join in our celebrations”

From Peter Adu (The Gambia)

“The strong existing ties between Christians and Muslims in The Gambia have been strengthened by the Church through education. Since its establishment in the country around 1849, the Church has seen education as an instrument and vehicle of evangelisation and as a means of bringing the two religious traditions together. Although The Gambia is predominantly Muslim (only 30,000 Catholics out of a population of 1.2 million), the Church views its involvement in education as a means of breaking down the prejudices that the two religions might have towards each other. The Church therefore accepted to be a partner with Government in education, without any form of discrimination against Muslim brothers and sisters. In so doing, it places great emphasis on the spiritual and moral formation of all its students. In this way, the Church is said to have educated more Muslims than Catholics; it is its contribution to the building of a culture of pluralism, tolerance and respect for individual human rights and the freedom of worship”.

From Alex Osei, Kano, Northern Nigeria

Nigeria is a more complex situation. The recent introduction of the Sharia law into many of the northern states has greatly increased

tension and, according to Alex Osei, has pushed back the possibility of inter-religious dialogue. Religious tolerance must be our immediate aim:

“I believe there should be an evangelical attitude towards Islam, not allowing ourselves to be led by instinct, fear, or impulses for revenge. We must cultivate the attitude that Christ had when faced with those who disagreed or persecuted him...to be “wise as serpents and gentle as doves”. I believe that living amongst Muslims in mutual respect is an important form of missionary life and witness. It is even more necessary to do so now when circumstances have led some into fundamentalism, opposition and even hatred between peoples. We must see Islam as a challenge, a milieu where God is mysteriously present”

From John Atoba: Nigeria

John Atoba, also working in Nigeria, feels that the nature of the secular state, enshrined in the constitution since independence, should be firmly insisted upon:

“A positive theology of religious and political involvement needs to be developed which takes the Nigerian experience into account - positive, in the sense that it should not be developed just in reaction to the various initiatives undertaken by the Muslims in recent times. A model should be developed by which Christians can follow their faith in a nation that separates the exercise of religion from the power of government. All will have freedom of religion. But how possible will this be, since Muslims say they cannot enjoy full freedom of religion without the Sharia while Christians say it is impossible for them with the Sharia?

Easing the tension will take time, but Christians must take the first step - that is the nature of Christianity; they must show that a secular state is not trying to destroy their religion, that it does not mean “westernisation”, neo-colonialism or moral

decadence, but rather respect for the individual's belief and way of life."

From Henri Arthé: Pakistan

Henri is from the Indian Ocean Foundation; he sees the way forward to lie through and with the local Christians:

"Dialogue with Islam in the context of Pakistan must be done through an effective solidarity with the local Christian community. Living each day in an atmosphere of frustration and uncertainty, how can the Christians be encouraged to enter into dialogue with their Muslim neighbours? I feel that any such dialogue will have to avoid an approach that is theoretical and ideological; with them, we should look for a path that takes into account the historical, cultural and socio-economic relationships behind their lived reality. If our efforts are to succeed, we will need to cultivate a great interior openness and a readiness to be transformed in order to reach out to the other person".

From Patrick Hollande

Patrick has spent 30 years living and working in an Islamic milieu in Senegal and Guinée. He shared some of his insights on the past, present and future relationships with Islam:

I would like to draw attention to certain developments:

- If there are some open, modern and laicising tendencies in present-day Islam, it remains a fact that orthodox Islam, Sunni and classic, entertains a nostalgia for the golden age society in Medina at the time of the prophet Mohammed and would like to see it restored. By its nature, Islam aims at establishing a State and Society governed by Islamic law (Shari'a). This tendency is seen in West Africa (Mauritania, Nigeria) and appears to be spreading. We should remember that there were already theocracies in the 18th and 19th centuries - at Fouta-Djalon (Guinée), Macina

(Mali), Toucouleur country (the valley of the river Senegal), Hausa land (Sokoto, Kano in present-day Nigeria) - with great warrior leaders like El Hadj Omar Tall and Usman Dan Fodio.

- There is still a "sacralising" tendency in Islam (e.g. the sacred character of mosques, holy cities, Mecca - forbidden to non-Muslims) There is a separation and a boundary between Muslim countries (*World of Peace*) and Infidel countries (*World of War*).
- An exaggerated "sacralisation" can lead to fanaticism. Extremist groups claim to be defending the "rights of God" and end up by taking over God's judgmental role, with power over life and death and, sometimes, a real disregard for human beings.
- The concept of human rights, which people see as the basis for dialogue today, is a product of modern, democratic societies, inspired by the French revolution and the Judeo-Christian tradition. For Islam, Man (represented by Adam) is born a Muslim. Real man is a Muslim.
- Islam, which embraces all aspects of private and public social life, tends by its nature towards globalisation and totalitarianism.
- Islam is the religion of success, of pride and optimism. The believing Muslim who is able to live his life in harmony, security and peace, can appear as somebody tolerant and open. But as soon as Islam is threatened in its faith (fitna), is attacked (crusades, colonisation, economic arrogance and superiority of the West) and humiliated, violence and intolerance are unleashed.
- Proselytism, the desire for the expansion or defense of Islam through Djihad by force of arms seems something logical for Muslims, despite what some people say. On the other hand, let us not forget that support for religious

freedom is something only recently acquired by the Christian Church”.

From Harrie Tullemans

In Europe, there must be more Spiritans living and working in close proximity to Islam than anywhere else in the world, but very few are involved in any kind of direct dialogue. After many years working in Tanzania, Harrie is in the Spiritan community in the docks area of Rotterdam where there are a large number of Muslim immigrants. He is convinced that people who have spent their lives working in other cultures have had an ideal preparation for inter-religious dialogue in the European context:

“Europe still has to learn and accept that for the new world order to come about, other cultures and religions must necessarily play a role in the redefining of European identity. It must learn to listen and respect, and rid itself of those feelings of superiority which are such an obstacle to a fruitful living together of different religions and cultures. Without a radical change of attitude, an effective dialogue will never come about. Europe must make room for other cultures to reassert themselves, shake off their inferiority complex and consider themselves as equal partners in any dialogue.

...It must be evident to all that pastors with a missionary experience should be in the forefront of this historic challenge. They have spent many years equipping themselves for living within two or more cultures. From personal experience, they know how difficult this process can be, but also how rewarding. Many have come to know the richness of other cultures; they can testify how these cultural and religious contacts have changed their own identity and their outlook on life”.

From Mons. Chidi Denis Isizoh

The confreres in Banjul were happy to have a contribution from the Vatican at their meeting. Mons. Isizoh is responsible for the Africa

desk at the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue. After an overview of the history and work of the Pontifical Council, including its work for Christian-Muslim dialogue, he gave a list of suggestions for Spiritans engaged in this field:

“It is demanded of those who work for the Gospel that they ‘should be scientifically prepared for their tasks, especially for dialogue with non-Christian religions and cultures’ (Ad Gentes 34).

- There is a need to introduce a course on Islam in Spiritan Houses of Formation;
- Spiritan experts should be trained in such institutes as PISAI in Rome and the School of African and Oriental Studies in London;
- A separate desk should be established in the Spiritan Generalate in Rome to follow developments in Christian-Muslim relations in the world;
- Missionaries must strive to interpret the worldview of the people which holds the key to understanding how they behave in inter-religious relations;
- Team spirit is essential. All your projects, as Spiritans, must fall in line with the programme of the diocese where you are working as missionaries. You should collaborate with other religious congregations and societies in the area and work in conjunction with the Episcopal Conference.

"I believe one of the greatest challenges to Christians in the present circumstances is to take the trouble to know about what Sharia means, within the context of the life of the Muslim. I believe that very often statements are made which clearly demonstrate that one does not appreciate what the Sharia really means or entails. Unfortunately, it has become like a battle cry and the tendency is to consider it as the Muslim position which Christians must fight against. Maybe, if more effort were made to explain what the Sharia means, it would be easier for Christians to respond in a positive way to the phenomenon. This programme of a symposium is therefore a step in the right direction. It is particularly gratifying that young seminarians are here to learn what Sharia is all about so that they in their turn can pass on the knowledge to their flocks when they become priests. It is then certainly going to be in the best interest of Nigeria if we are better informed about one another's faith" (Archbishop John Onayekan of Abuja to the SIST Symposium, March 2001).

“THE HOPE WITHIN US”: OUR MISSION TO THE MUSLIM WORLD

From the Participants at the Banjul Meeting

The confreres present at the Spiritan meeting in Banjul in June 2002 asked Robert Ellison and Jean Michel Jolibois to compile this message to their confreres world-wide in the light of a general approval which they had given to its content and format at the end of the meeting. To put it in its historical context, we have also attached the statement made at the end of the previous meeting on Dialogue with Muslims in Dakar in 1989.

Introduction

As our modern world continues to move towards a greater level of intermingling of cultures and religions, the Muslim world in particular presents itself to us as a reality which cannot be ignored. In the last thirteen years or so, with the demise of communism and the end of the cold war, we are more conscious than ever of the polarisation which is rapidly developing between the ‘Christian-West’ and the ‘Arab-Muslim’ world. The fears, the level of mistrust and suspicion, and the deep-seated feelings of injustice and oppression among these two world powers (from various standpoints), have brought about a new struggle for control and domination – somewhat reminiscent of similar serious tensions between Christianity and Islam in former times.

These new tensions have already given rise to levels of terror and violence that have horrified and shocked the whole world. And unfortunately, the risk of ongoing conflict and confrontation continues to dominate world headlines. Both parties are deadlocked in a struggle in which each sees the other as a serious threat to the future of humanity. This situation points to the need for some serious reflection and questioning among ourselves as to possible underlying reasons for which the ‘Christian-West’ might be in some way responsible for the present volatile situation.

All of this underlines for us the acute urgency of inter-religious dialogue with the Muslim peoples among whom we work. In this message, we wish to affirm that we are happy to be able to live this ministry of inter-religious dialogue as an integral part of our Spiritan vocation and we are convinced of the need to pursue this ministry in spite of its inherent difficulties.

In addition to this, the world in which we live is a world which is being profoundly influenced by globalisation, secularisation, religious indifference, and also the absence of any religious belief at all. No one religion is capable of responding to such challenges on its own. The various world religions must begin to collaborate in order to provide a combined response to such challenges which are common to all believers.

Why do we believe in and commit ourselves to dialogue with Muslims?

Over and above the need to take some action towards defusing the tensions mentioned above, we believe that our faith possesses an inner dynamism which makes a constant call on us to model our lives on the mystery of the Incarnation. Here we ponder on the dialogue of salvation which God, in the person of Jesus, initiated with the human family, after men and women had become alienated from God, from themselves and from each other. It was a dialogue that was gratuitously undertaken by God, with full respect for human freedom and that was destined for ALL.

Dialogue is therefore a fruit of the whole spirit of the Gospel message. Whatever be the response, we are called to live our faith among the nations. We are called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. This mission includes an invitation to peace, to pardon and to reconciliation – to those values which we associate with the coming of the Kingdom of God here on earth. The Church is called to be a sign of this unity and an instrument of this peace. We want to share in this outreach of Christ and the Church, in this process of encounter with our Muslim brothers and sisters in a special way, in the light of the misunderstandings, barriers and tensions which divide us. It is a call to redeem many mistakes from the past.

Over the last 300 years, we Spiritans have encountered many peoples of different faiths and cultures. We believe that the time has now come to open ourselves to a new understanding of such relationships, in a spirit of humility, openness and trust. In one of his instructions to missionaries, Libermann wrote: *‘If they find men who reject the faith that they have come to preach, the missionaries will not fail to teach them human learning as they do the faithful, and with the same charity and care’* (N.D. X., 515-516).

We also recognise that the meeting with another religious tradition can become a source for our own enrichment, through the sharing of our own faith and in the discovery of the spiritual values of another faith tradition. For Spiritans working especially in Africa, dialogue with Islam at this level should also include dialogue with African Traditional Religions. In this context, we should note that the two are often linked and interwoven. Such exchanges can help to renew the quality of our own faith; sometimes, these may also demand that we allow ourselves to be challenged by what the other is saying to us. Even where we come up against hostility or resistance or simply a lack of reciprocal response, we are challenged to deepen our own faith in the mystery of the Cross, and in the sense of rejection which Christ experienced throughout his life. We begin to share in the redemptive mystery of Christ who, by his death on the cross, made the two into one and broke down the barrier which used to keep them apart. Our Rule of Life invites us to *“willingly accept those tasks for which the Church has difficulty in finding workers”* (SRL, 4).

Seen in this light, dialogue with Muslims forms an integral part of our Spiritan mission. And given the level of tension and conflict in the world to-day, the future of the human family will depend to a large extent on the outcome of inter-religious dialogue as a part of the Church’s mission.

What does this dialogue entail?

There is a deep-seated suspicion among Muslims that Christians who now invite them to dialogue have hidden intentions of wanting to convert them. Even our very presence can become a real threat for

many, especially in relation to the social and charitable works of the Church in favour of poor and needy people. We must do all in our power to reduce the ambiguity that is often inevitable in such circumstances, especially when we have access to 'outside' funding which they do not have. The power of money to control and dominate can be a very sensitive issue in such situations. Whether in the dialogue of daily life or social collaboration, our primary motive must always be that of healing past mistakes and opening bridges of understanding, respect and friendship amongst each other. At the same time, we can never exclude the hope that some may indeed come to explicit faith in Christ. The dividing line here is a very fine thread....We need to be scrupulously honest about our intentions. And so we try to live the mission of the Church in a world of religious pluralism in such a way that it be clear that dialogue must never be motivated by the desire to undermine another religious group.

However, the very notion of threat is inherent in the Christian message. The radical call to love, to serve, to forgive...creates tensions for all. It even threatens us Christians for all that is still lacking in our lives. We cannot compromise our faith. But we must also make a distinction between what causes a threat and what causes a challenge or healthy tension. Questions linked to truth, justice and human rights usually engender tensions. In the Gospel of Luke, Simeon spoke of the child Jesus as 'a sign of contradiction'. And Jesus was such from the perspective of weakness: he had no status, he was an itinerant, he was poor, he had nowhere to lay his head. The integrity in all that we do should come from our fidelity to that Jesus who came to identify himself with the oppressed, the weak, the outcasts of society (Matthew, 25). Some Muslims have recognised this dimension of our faith - by our availability, by the way in which we welcome and approach people and by the services rendered unconditionally to all without exception.

We must be ready therefore to give at all times an account of the hope that is within us, but we do so with courtesy and gentleness (cf. I Peter 3, 15-16). The important thing is not so much the 'success' of our social works as the need of creating a 'platform' or opportunity for meeting with the other.

In all of this, we begin to see ourselves as a church no longer focused on its own status or need for mere self-perpetuation, but rather as a servant of human communion; as a church that is prepared to suffer and become small in fidelity to the project of love; as a church that chooses to serve rather than control and will risk itself so that many may have life.

How can we implement such a vision?

Within the Congregation:

In the area of formation: We believe that there is an urgent need for Spiritans to integrate into their apostolate an openness to and respect for people of other religions. The motivation and preparation for this should be integrated into initial and ongoing formation. We are encouraged by the fact that 'stagiaires' sent recently to Islamic countries have developed a taste for this kind of mission. It is important that such experiences be kept alive within them, with the aid of a proper reflection and evaluation.

Ongoing formation: those already engaged in this apostolate must never neglect the need to renew (at a personal level) their commitment to ongoing language-learning and the study of culture and religion. A proper investment in the time needed for such matters should be set aside.

At the level of the Generalate: The Congregation should encourage more confreres to specialise in studies relating to dialogue with Muslims; it should also encourage first appointments to this kind of mission on the condition that they would last for a significant period of time. (In this context, we note with regret, a general decline in the area of language-learning).

There is need for an inventory of Institutes where specialisation and research in the area of Arabic and Islamic studies can be done – internationally, and also at regional level where possible.

The General Council should appoint a special co-ordinator who would foster communication between confreres working among Muslims, and

who would organise periodic meetings on the theme of inter-religious dialogue within the Congregation.

At regional/local level: The kind of dialogue which we have spoken about at this meeting must first of all be lived in our own Spiritan communities and also within the local Church, in a way that would enhance communal prayer, theological reflection and the elaboration of a common vision and project. This in itself would become part of our prophetic vocation within the life of the local Church.

We need to draw inspiration from the dynamism of our Founders – and Libermann in particular. There are situations where we can offer no more than a silent presence to the Muslim community in which we live; but even this becomes in itself a first step in proclaiming the Gospel. This leads us to seek and value a contemplative stance.

Dialogue understood in this way is much less a human strategy than a movement from God within us, where we find ourselves in relationships with others, calling us to trust and confidence. As Spiritans, we need to see what more we can do to favour a more intense prayer life, both as individuals and in community.

In Collaboration with Others

The Local Church: All our efforts to promote a spirit of dialogue will bear little fruit unless we act in a spirit of genuine collaboration with the Bishop, the priests of the diocese, other religious congregations and the laity. It is their Church in which we are called to serve. We should encourage formation programmes for all, and in a special way for catechists and other leaders in the Christian community.

The very mention of dialogue can sometimes lead us to experience obstacles or even criticism from the Catholic community itself, especially where we get no reciprocal response or even opposition from the Muslim community. This should not deter our efforts; the love of Christ compels us to move forward – with patience and understanding.

Other Christian Churches, Communities and NGOs: In the same way, we should invite the co-operation of all such groups (where

possible) to take part in the vision of dialogue which we believe in, especially where we interact in any way in our relations with the Muslim community. The scandal of a divided Church can seriously damage this sensitive vision of mission as dialogue.

Statement from the Dakar Meeting (1989):

Evangelisation in a multi-religious context

We met together to share our missionary experiences and to help us clarify the theological and pastoral visions on which we base our activities. We are not claiming to re-define the meaning of evangelisation or to restate its different aspects. In one way or another, we are all in contact with Islam or other religions. We feel it could be helpful if, starting from our personal experiences, we draw out certain aspects of this type of evangelisation. These aspects are to be integrated into our spiritan experience as guidelines for our shared mission. They call us to personal conversion.

1. Meeting the other person

We have to meet others in dialogue. This does not mean sitting down to talk about religion; it is rather to enter into that movement of a God who dialogues with men and women. Dialogue has been the attitude of God throughout the history of salvation; by means of this same history, God has shown that he is Trinity and therefore dialogue is of his essence. In this sense, dialogue is the revelation of divine love.

The summit of dialogue between God and the human race is reached with the mystery of the Incarnate Word. Dialogue means both living by the Spirit of Jesus and pursuing his mission. It also includes following him to face the risks inherent in every encounter, including that of the Cross.

The Word became flesh in a particular culture. Jesus lived friendship and sharing. He admired the faith of pagans. He struggled against all forms of human suffering. He made religion live in spirit and in truth. He announced the Gospel and faith in a God who is Father. He instituted the Church and the sacraments. All this is part of Mission. The salvation offered is for all. Jesus wanted to meet men and women to bring about their salvation.

Evangelisation is not just a question of baptising: it means helping people to live in the Spirit of Jesus Christ. It is carried out as much through presence, friendship, sharing of life and prayer as it is through the direct proclamation of the One who rose from the dead.

Therefore, we totally reject any marginalisation of our activity in the context of spiritan mission. There is no such thing as a distinction between “first evangelisation” and “mission as dialogue”; **all** mission, if it is truly faithful to the action of God as revealed by Jesus, is dialogue. This is confirmed in our Rule of Life (SRL 16.3). It implies the need for a respectful approach to all people in the totality of their human nature, including their religion. There is no basis for talking of “dialogue” when it concerns the major, structured religions and “evangelisation” in the case of so-called “traditional religions”.

Through his meetings with people, Jesus gradually discovered the depth, the extent and the demands of his mission. So in following Jesus, we too must let ourselves be transformed through our encounter with others. Perhaps this conviction will lead us to look again at some of our practices.

2. In the Church, in the service of the Kingdom

Mission has an essentially ecclesial aspect: we announce the Gospel as people who are rooted in and marked by a community of believers.

The Church is at the service of the Kingdom of God; she is a sign of this Kingdom, not its definitive form. A Church which was only concerned about itself, its numerical growth, its structures and its organisation would no longer be a reliable sign.

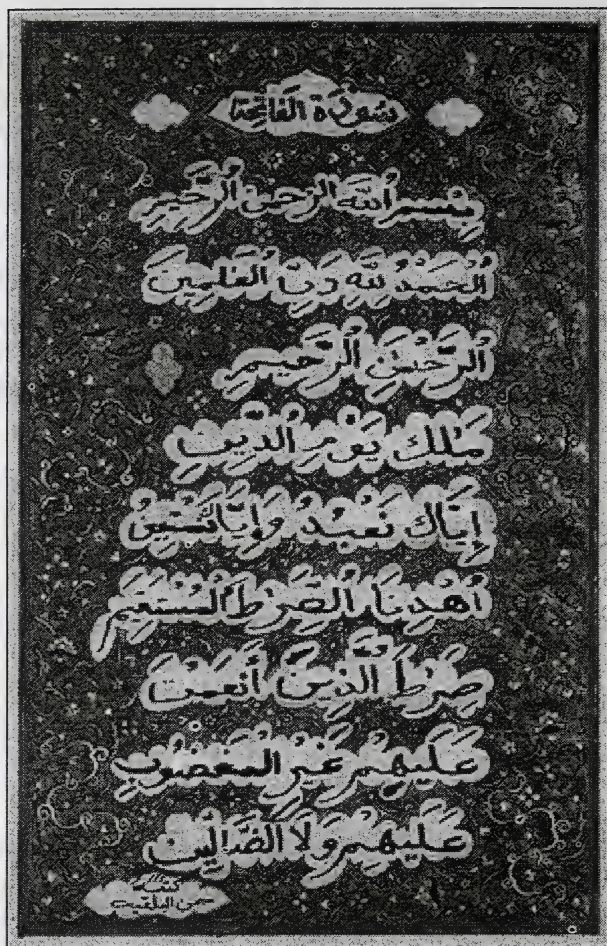
Mission is a challenge for the Church itself. Meeting with others and entering the worlds of other religions compels her to discover and witness to new facets of the Kingdom. In rejecting proselytism in the worst sense, she proclaims the gratuity of the love of God and the freedom of the Spirit. In the name of this same freedom, she is ready to welcome all those who are journeying towards Christ.

As a sign of the Kingdom, the Church must work for the liberation of all men and women. She will take a stand against oppression in all its forms, including religious oppression, and she will be careful not to join the ranks of the oppressors herself. Hence her commitment to Justice and Peace.

3. Difficulties arising from meeting with other religions, particularly Islam:

- Suspicion of proselytism;
- The ambiguous nature of our social works;
- Confrontation with various forms of fundamentalism;
- Political pressures and compromises;
- The challenge of modernity;
- Historical influence of the crusades and colonisation;
- Occasional suspicion of our own Church;
- The lack of response to proffered dialogue.

Such difficulties can lead to tensions between different religious groups. It is a part of our prophetic role to invite the communities with whom we are committed to overcome fear and to build up a calm and clear knowledge of each other.



The opening of the Koran

In the Name of God
 the Merciful, the Compassionate
 Praise belongs to God, Lord of all
 Being,
 the All-merciful, the all Compas-
 sionate
 The Master of the Day of Doom
 Thee only we serve;

to Thee alone we pray for succor.
 Guide us in the straight path,
 the path of those whom Thou hast
 blessed,
 not of those against whom Thou art
 are wrathful,
 nor of those who are astray

MISSION AT THE FRONTIERS AND THE FRONTIERS OF MISSION

Pierre Schouver

On June 6th of this year, our Superior General, Pierre Schouver, gave this conference in Lisbon as his contribution to the Spiritan Missionary Colloquium, organised by the Portuguese Spiritans

Some years ago, when I was returning to Africa after a holiday, my 80 year-old aunt said to me; “*What exactly are you doing down there?*” She knew very well that I was going to continue with my missionary work and she had given me money over the years to help. But if I had simply told her that I was going to preach and baptise, I think she would have been disappointed. Knowing my aunt, I knew that she wanted me to tell her, in a simple and clear way, what was the real nature of my commitment in Africa. My aunt was no revolutionary; she continued to support the missions, but she was no longer clear as to what it was all about.

A superficial glance might lead people to believe that the great missionary adventure of the past has now finally played itself out. In the early 70s, one journalist wrote: *Mission? Another beautiful page that has now been turned over by the wind of history*”. For centuries, missionaries left their homes to take the Gospel to places which had still not heard it. These countries were also less developed economically than Europe. They had sometimes been conquered, exploited and even reduced to slavery by the so-called “Christian” countries; so missionary witness also included being at the service of these exploited peoples and defending them against their oppressors. (cf. the Réglements of Libermann in 1849). “Mission” also meant setting out on long and dangerous voyages for places in Africa, Asia, Oceania and some areas of Latin America and the Caribbean.

One could be forgiven for thinking that this generous, even heroic, adventure has now come to an end. The Gospel has been taken to all continents, at least to those which were willing to accept it. The countries which used to produce the missionaries seem to have lost interest in such undertakings; many now look upon missionary work as a type of proselytism which is no longer acceptable in the world of today. At a meeting of inter-religious dialogue in Barcelona last year, I asked the leaders present what they thought of "conversions", in the sense of changing from one religion to another. From the deafening silence that followed, I got the impression that I had truly put my foot in it, making everybody feel uncomfortable. Other religions do not look kindly on an evangelisation that aims at conversions to the Catholic Church. So is mission dying? Is it something that is tied in with a cultural and religious situation that belongs to the past?

An evolution that is coming to birth

This challenge of the alleged 'death' of mission has been taken up. It is evident that mission has changed a great deal, and not just cosmetically, like the woman who is no longer recognisable when she emerges from her hairdresser! One of the fundamental changes has come about precisely because previous missionary undertakings have been successful: local Churches have been established and the number of Christians, priests, religious and committed lay people has continued to increase. But at the same time, religious practice and vocations to the priesthood and religious life have been falling off in the north. So the missionary traffic, which previously traveled a one-way street from north to south now finds itself on roads travelling in all directions. In our Congregation, for example, Nigerians are heading to Taiwan and the Philippines, Mauritians to Pakistan, Congolese to Brazil, Brazilians to Senegal, Australians to Kenya and young African confreres are coming to help the Churches of Europe. Is this just a simple change of direction, a cycli or dialectic phenomenon? Or is it something else? In view of the missionary challenges we are facing today, it is worth taking a closer look.

In some ways, in the past we carried a *prefabricated* Church to other continents, already fixed in its essentials and therefore, to a consider-

able extent, something foreign. A theologian from Cameroon put it like this: *"The Church was transported to new countries in much the same way as some rich Americans dismembered old French Castles so as to reassemble them, brick by brick, on the banks of the Potomac"*. After the pioneering period, the missionaries gradually planted the structures and the Christian life of their *home* Church, despite the fact that they were very open to the local people. Even in Europe, the Church that had been handed down from the past was in some ways beginning to look "foreign" to contemporaries. In the 60s, the worker priests were singing, *"My mother is a princess who lives far away"*, meaning that they felt the Church of their day was completely out of touch with the world in which the workers were living.

In both the north and south of this planet, the accelerating whirlwind of change calls for more than just a new strategy in sending out missionary personnel. A much deeper and more widespread evolution seems to be underway regarding the nature of mission today. It goes to the very essence of things and is the work of the Creator Spirit whose signs we seek to discover and whose inspirations we try to follow. Our recent Chapters have given pride of place to experiences of mission today and their interpretation: *"Where is the Spirit leading us?"* We have no ready-made solutions. We ourselves are in the midst of the storm in our Institutes, our communities, our psychology. We are not living on another planet where we can quietly study the different currents at play and work out relevant strategies. It will take time to find a concept of mission that is both new and yet closer to the original Christian tradition. To help us find an authentic vision of mission and its frontiers in this tempest of change, let us take a brief look at our sources.

The perspective of the Acts of the Apostles

One day, the Apostles were together and they put this question to Jesus: *"Lord, is this the time at which you are to restore sovereignty to Israel?"* He answered, *"It is not for you to know about dates or times which the Father has set within his own control. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you will bear witness*

for me in Jerusalem and throughout all Judea and Samaria and even in the farthest corners of the earth" (Acts 1:6-8). A footnote in the new French Ecumenical Translation of the Bible says that the question put by the Apostles "*expresses the Jewish hope that there would be an immediate restoration of national identity centered on Israel...But the reply of Jesus points to much time and space in which the Apostles must give their witness; the whole plan and meaning of the Acts are encapsulated here*".

Mission means being a witness to the death and resurrection of Christ. Even though we can no longer see him, Jesus is always there in our Christian communities and he walks beside the missionaries. They talk with him in their hearts while they are speaking to new peoples, so that Christ is not just the person *about* whom they are speaking: it is *he* who is speaking through them. It is in him that the hearers believe, not just in the words of the missionaries (cf. John 4:42). The Father fixes the times and the moments, the different stages of the journey. We do not need to know them - it is not our business. But we are given a power, that of the Holy Spirit who lives in us, so that we can be witnesses, and with this power, we will be able to cross the frontiers when the right moment comes.

The ways of mission are an open adventure: the dynamism of its witness is that of a living fruitfulness mixed in with the unplanned and the unforeseen. It has nothing to do with cloning, photocopying or restoration. The pledge of its authenticity is ultimately to be seen in its fruits, even if we have no idea when or where they will be produced. Mission is a part of the mystery of Christ; as the Itaici Chapter put it, it is "*a spirituality, not a strategy*". So where exactly are the frontiers that need to be crossed? And if we are called to carry the Gospel to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8), where are the new horizons to be found?

Guidelines in recent documents of the Church

The Magisterium of the Church has given precision to the meaning of mission at the frontiers. Viewed on its own, the Constitution "***Lumen Gentium***" of Vatican II could have been seen as tolling the death knell for the "professional" missionary when it declared that "*the whole*

Church is missionary”: but the missionaries at the Council were completely united against any such interpretation. And in fact the Decree “*Ad Gentes*” defended the permanence of a specific missionary vocation.

The encyclical “*Redemptoris Missio*” brought further light to the debate:

- “*To say that the whole Church is missionary does not preclude the existence of a specific mission ‘ad gentes’, just as saying that all Catholics must be missionaries not only does not exclude, but actually requires that there be persons who have a specific vocation to be life-long missionaries ‘ad gentes’*” (RM 32);
- “*Looking at today's world from the viewpoint of evangelisation, we can distinguish three situations:*
 - *First ... peoples, groups, and socio-cultural contexts in which Christ and his Gospel are not known ... This is mission ‘ad gentes’ in the proper sense of the term.*
 - *Secondly, there are Christian communities with adequate and solid ecclesial structures...*
 - *Thirdly, there is an intermediate situation, particularly in countries with ancient Christian roots, and occasionally in the younger Churches, where entire groups of the baptised have lost a living sense of the faith ...*” (RM 33);
- “*The specific nature of this mission ‘ad gentes’ consists in its being addressed to non-Christians. It is therefore necessary to ensure that this specifically missionary work that Jesus entrusted and still entrusts each day to his Church does not become an indistinguishable part of the overall mission of the whole People of God and as a result become neglected or forgotten... There must be no lessening of the impetus to preach the Gospel and to establish new Churches among peoples or communities where they do not yet exist, for this is the first task of the Church, which has been sent forth to all peoples and to the very ends of the earth*” (RM 34).

Facing the new challenges with an open mind

Henry Koren stressed how much Libermann was open to new things. He traced this attitude back to his Jewish roots; the vision of the Bible is that God did not just create in the beginning but continues to create throughout the course of history and speaks to us through the signs of the times.¹ Libermann encourages us to put our trust in concrete experience and let ourselves be guided by the Spirit. He often draws the attention of his contemporaries to the profound changes that are taking place in society and urges them to commit themselves to appropriate projects at the front lines: *"The trouble with the clergy in recent times is that they have got bogged down in the ideas of the past. The world has moved on: those who oppose us have re-deployed their artillery in line with spirit of the age while we just stick where we were. We must move with the world while staying immersed in the spirit of the Gospel. We should do good and fight evil in the context of the mood and the spirit of our contemporary world"* (NDX. p. 151).

The frontiers and horizons of mission are not primarily determined by geography, races, or cultures but by situations. According to *Redemptoris Missio*, the frontiers of mission *ad gentes* are to be found in *"the peoples, groups, and socio-cultural contexts in which Christ and his Gospel are not known, or which lack Christian communities sufficiently mature to be able to incarnate the faith in their own environment and proclaim it to other groups"* (RM 33).

Dominant characteristics of our world today

The conference of Bandung in 1955 threw a spotlight on the **diversity of free and responsible peoples who are all equal**. It put missionaries on their guard against ignoring these differences: they must communicate their message while respecting the culture and freedom of the listeners. As missionaries, we have no right to impose our own culture or to draw others into it - and we have committed ourselves to live by the same principles within our own religious family.

Our **secularised societies** have called religious authority into question and have led some Christians into doubting or abandoning their faith.

But perhaps this situation can open up a path for us towards greater authenticity, where Christians can find a new way of living their faith. They would rely more on their personal experiences and learn to interpret them in the light of the Gospel. In the same context, the passing on of the message would depend, above all, on the preacher's practical testimony of life: *"Modern man is much more willing to listen to authentic witnesses than to teachers"* (Paul VI. "Evangelii Nuntiandi", no. 42).

Our lives are dominated by a neo-liberal economy which covers the whole world. The speeding up of communications has made the world into a big village. On the one hand, this movement is presenting extraordinary opportunities for improved communication and collaboration, which could be a great advantage for the spreading of the Good News. But at the same time, the media and the markets are creating a society dominated by money, power and consumerism. People are becoming quicker and more efficient - but also much more superficial. Globalisation is contributing to the degradation of the world of nature. It is certainly creating more wealth, but always to the advantage of the strongest; as a result, a whole new dimension is being given to the service and defense of the poor, an essential part of any mission.

All these changes have an effect on human relationships and can create conflicts. Many of the ties between people that were taken for granted in society have now been loosened or lost altogether and in the new state of things, the quality of relationships is often inferior to what it was. Many people live alone, often in a state of stress. New conflicts keep arising; to economic migrants one must add those who are fleeing from war situations.

The horizons of mission today

The aim of mission is to carry the light and strength of the Gospel to the boundaries and the depths of human existence in our own time. We can identify some of the areas of our present-day world which stand in need of evangelisation:

- Through science and technology, the human race has acquired an increased control over nature and even over itself. Unimagined possibilities are opening up. But we are not always resisting the temptation to play the Sorcerer's Apprentice: while amassing ever more goods, we degrade nature and bring benefits to only a minority.
- We have grown (perhaps to excess) in awareness of our unique freedom and the rights of every human being. This can lead us to make a more personal search for truth and love, an individual quest for God himself; but it can also make us individualists, even confusing ourselves with God. As the philosopher Husserl put it, having got the measure of this world, humans have now forgotten how to get the measure of themselves!
- The inhabitants of this planet are engaged in unifying it with physical and social communications, as well as by economic and financial globalisation. We Christians and missionaries share the hope for a united and peaceful world with the rest of humanity. But we also see strong divisive agents at work; we believe with our whole hearts and with all our experience of faith that the witness of the Gospel is calling us to this new horizon.

New missionary frontiers to be crossed

The above picture of our present-day world highlights the need for a commitment to justice and peace and to safeguarding the integrity of creation. Our new frontiers are those we have to cross in order to be with the poor: slum-dwellers, street children, drug addicts, victims of AIDS, neglected rural populations, young people who cannot find a job. In addition, we have a duty to look for the source of the on-going impoverishment of a very large part of humanity and for what is causing so much exclusion and violence throughout the world. Such action, of its nature, will be long-term and on a wide scale.

We have to cross cultural frontiers to be authentically close to the Masaai, the Borana, the Hamar, the Pokot, the Pygmies, the Bassari, the Mandiagos, the Bassa, the Marwaris, the Melanesians, the Guarani,

the Huastecos, the Nahuatis ... And we are far from having carried the Gospel to the heart of all those cultures where the Church has been established for a long time. Cultural frontiers are still very pertinent, as can be seen in Latin America after 500 years of evangelisation. Faced with all this, we have to continue our missionary tradition of learning local languages and striking deep roots amongst the people to whom we are sent. We must never feel guilty about working with a relatively small number of people. Big operations can be deceptive: all the work of a rapid evangelisation that seeks, as its priority, to get a foot in the door can be swept away by the first storm that hits it. But when we take a person's unique experience of the call of God as our starting point, we are surely on the right road. We are not aiming at immediate results in our mission; we believe in the slow but lasting fruitfulness of the witness of communities inspired by the Gospel.

We try to cross over the frontiers of the secularised world. We help those who are hungry and thirsty for spiritual sustenance, especially through our work in parishes. We help lay people to prepare themselves for a Christian commitment in society. It is also good to make new plans for first evangelisation, to seek out the forgotten people in our villages and suburbs; their lives are like a closed book that we have probably only glanced at in the past. This is also true of those reaching out to youth in pastoral work and education; there is much to learn for those who are trying to enter the world of young people today.

Mission is becoming an extended presence and a dialogue of life. In the past, we have been used to the preaching of the Gospel culminating in some people entering the Christian community. But there are missions today where there are scarcely any baptisms. However, in coming into contact with Gospel witnesses, people can develop a deeper religious sense, become more liberated and commit themselves to the service of the poor. The front line of mission today is often to be found where many generous people have come together to help, independent of any religious affiliation. In the face of suffering, urgency and danger, our differences do not vanish but they do become relativised. We feel that we are one with others at that level where God's love frees and gathers together.

Finally, we continue to look for new geographical frontiers that need to be crossed: Mozambique, Taiwan, Philippines, Bolivia, Seychelles, Benin. With these calls which are in line with our Spiritan vocation, we find a new source of spiritual nourishment for our religious family.

A frontier in our own lives that needs to be passed

If we want to remain true to our vocation, discernment and conversion are needed. While being fully engaged in contemporary society, we have to preserve and strengthen our contact with He who is our source as individuals and community. This is one of the main elements of on-going formation. Mission itself is a place of renewal: those of different cultures and religions teach us to be more deeply Christian. At the same time, our communities, increasingly international and intercultural, are places where we must learn to be more open towards our own confreres.

By reaching out to others, we cross a frontier which is within us; we leave behind our self-absorption and our narrowness. It is a type of death and resurrection. In the company of our confreres in community and those to whom we are sent, we join that great human pilgrimage to meet the God who is Love.

Pierre Schouver

¹ Henry Koren: *Essays on the Spiritan Charism and on Spiritan History*. Spiritus Press, 1990).

The Cover

The triangle represents the Trinity: it is coloured red to accentuate our dedication to the Holy Spirit. The blue circle signifies Mary who became the mother of Jesus through the Holy Spirit; therefore one of the points of the triangle cuts the circle. The green path represents hope. Thus the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, under the protection of Mary, is travelling along the path of hope and trust.

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